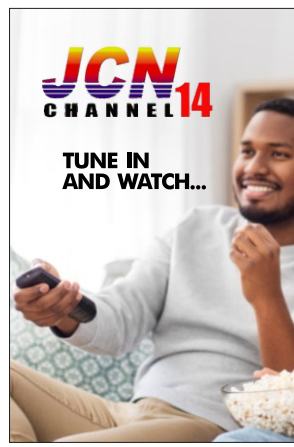




The Bahama Journal

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GOVERNMENT TO REDUCE COST OF LIVING

BY GERRINO J. SAUNDERS
Bahama Journal News Editor

The 2026/2027 fiscal budget has been successfully passed in the Upper and Lower Chambers. This budget came into effect as of July 1st. The Davis administration has indicated that it is ready to hit the ground running and continue building on the success made in their previous term.

During his contribution to the resolution to thank Governor General Dame Cynthia Pratt for her “gracious” reading of the Speech from the Throne Prime Minister Philip Davis once again outlined the government’s vision for the next five years.

Despite the overwhelming victory at the polls on May 12 th Mr. Davis said he does not take the support his party received as congratulations for a job well done or a celebration of their performance record but that he takes it all as instruction.

He said, “Voters looked at five years of work, and they told us to keep going. So, today, I am here to outline how we intend to keep building on progress,” said Mr. Davis.

According to the Prime Minister over the next five years the government will “aggressively” go after reducing the cost of living beginning with making food and other grocery items more affordable with policies like the removal of value added tax from uncooked food items, reduced rates on baby items, feminine products, and medical supplies.

See Story Cont. Pg. 3



Prime Minister Hon. Philip Davis KC

BNSI LABOUR FORCE SURVEY: EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY SHOWS PROMISE



Minister of Labour, Public Service and National Insurance Hon. Pia Glover-Rolle

BY ALEXANDRIA RECKLEY
Staff Writer

More Bahamians found jobs during the second half of 2025 as the country’s unemployment rate remained stable, according to the latest Labour Force Survey released by the Bahamas National Statistical Institute (BNSI). The report, which examines labour market conditions during the third and fourth quarters of 2025, shows continued growth in employment alongside an expanding labour force, suggesting that job creation kept pace with the number of Bahamians entering the workforce.

The survey found that the national unemployment rate stood at 8.8 percent in the third quarter before improving slightly to 8.7 percent in the fourth quarter. During the same period, employment increased by 3,450 people, rising from 222,575 employed people to 226,025, while the labour force expanded by 3,350 people, increasing from 244,140 to 247,490. The report notes that women accounted for more than 70 percent of the overall growth in the labour force, reflecting continued gains in female labour force participation.

See Story Cont. Pg. 3

U.S. POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CHIEF CALLS ON AMBASSADOR JONES



The new Political and Economic Chief of the United States Embassy in the Bahamas, Mr. Alex MacFarlane made a courtesy call on The Bahamas Ambassador to the U.S. His Excellency Wendall Jones on Thursday, 2nd July, 2026 at the Embassy of The Bahamas in Washington, DC.

Ambassador Jones and Mr. McFarlane discussed a number of economic and political issues relating to The Bahamas.

COOPER ON SUMMER EDUCATION DEVELOPMENTS



Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister of Education, Science, and Technology, Hon. Chester Cooper

BY MAKEIRA TUCKER
Journal Staff Writer

Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister of Education, Science, and Technology, Chester Cooper said on Monday that the government will continue teacher training programs over the summer and into the next semester. These initiatives, launched by former Minister of Education Glenys Hanna-Martin, currently involve more than 2,000 teachers nationwide.

Cooper said, “Teachers across the country have engaged vigorously in terms of improving numeracy and literacy.” “We have embarked upon financial education, entrepreneurship, technology, and more science in the curriculum,” Cooper explained. He said the ministry expects the training to continue because the new syllabus requires teachers to upskill. The minister added that there are many great educators in the system and the government will continue to support them in carrying out the mandate.

The government also recently signed a renewed contract with the University of the West Indies that could lead to a full-year UWI medical programme in The Bahamas. The programme would include the construction of a new medical facility in the capital. Cooper said, “We support all efforts in terms of education and training.” He added, “We met with UWI a few days ago.”

See Story Cont. Pg. 3

DARVILLE: LONGEVITY THERAPY SET TO HELP INDIVIDUALS WITH PARKINSON'S DISEASE



Health and Wellness Minister Hon. Dr. Michael Darville

BY ALEXANDRIA RECKLEY
Staff Writer

There is hope on the horizon for Bahamians suffering from Parkinson's disease now that a group of foreign investors have been given a license under the Longevity and Regenerative Medicine Act that allows them to use groundbreaking forms of therapy to treat the progressive neurological disorder that damages dopamine-producing brain cells. Health and Wellness Minister Dr. Michael Darville stated this recently, at the Kingdor National Parkinson Foundation's 26th Annual Charity Gala at the Atlantis Resort where patrons gathered to support the foundation's mission to raise awareness, provide support, and

improve the quality of life for individuals living with Parkinson's disease, as well as their families and caregivers.

Now, many of you may not know that in The Bahamas we passed a piece of legislation for Longevity and Regenerative Medicine, he told guests. If you were to search the literature, you will find out that there are many new, innovative therapies available for individuals suffering from Parkinson's disease.

He said details on exactly how the partnership between the Ministry of Health and the Kingdor Foundation will unfold are currently underway, but Dr. Darville affirmed his dedication to ensuring that these new health opportunities are available for all Bahamians.

Mavis Darling-Hill, founder and president of the Kingdor National Parkinson's Foundation addressed the urgent needs of the foundation. My journey to this moment has not been easy, she told attendees. It has been shaped by caregiving, by sacrifice, and by the quiet battles that no one, no Bahamian family, should face alone. Her experiences are a testament to the realities faced by others caring for individuals with Parkinson's disease.

She admitted that despite being an expert and a leader, the lack of localized information remains an ongoing battle one that leads to missed educational opportunities and potential funding.

Story Cont. Pg. 4

COOPER ON SUMMER EDUCATION DEVELOPMENTS

Story Cont. Pg. 1

They shared their plans with us, and we have been doing their clinical training for doctors for a long time."

This partnership between The Bahamas and UWI dates to 1997. Cooper explained, "Once they leave the University of the West Indies and completed their academics, they come to PMH for ongoing training." "That is going to continue. We've produced some of the best doctors that's practicing in the country," Cooper said. The minister added that the government provides subvention of about \$6 million dollars to UWI every year.

Mr. Cooper addressed the ministry's support for education throughout The Bahamas, "We support UB of course, our premiere tertiary institution," he said. He continued, "We're doing great things at BTVI. We're going to be looking to build a new campus at BTVI." The minister added that the government is planning to build a new school in New Providence and across the Family Islands. "The plans are in the works, and the work is going to be steady, and we are going to continue to progress in education," Cooper said.

The minister also said school repairs are scheduled for this summer. "As is required by the normal wear and tear of the system, we have already begun that process, we anticipate that it going to be completed by September," he said. "And we are looking to see how we could change the approach to ensure that there is not such a mad rush during the summer months," Cooper explained. He added that they are looking to build more internal capacity so some



Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister of Education, Science, and Technology, Hon. Chester Cooper



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Prime Minister Hon. Philip Davis KC

GOVERNMENT TO REDUCE COST OF LIVING

Story Cont. from Pg. 1

In this next five-year term, he said the government will bring competition legislation to stop the price-fixing and abuses that strain household budgets, and take steps to introduce standard rates for electricity across the country, while also reviewing real property tax rates so relief efforts can also reach Bahamian homeowners.

“We will grow more of what we eat, setting real production targets and empowering our farmers so more locally grown, healthy food is available in our stores,” said Prime Minister Davis.

He also lamented the fact that for too many

Bahamians, owning a home still feels out of reach. “We plan to make it possible for many more people to achieve their dream of homeownership,” said Mr. Davis.

Continuing he said, “We’ve raised the first-time homeowner exemption to 600,000 dollars. We are expanding Affordable Homes and Rent-to-Own opportunities so that hundreds more families each year can turn a key in the front door of a home they can call their own. For the families still renting, we will set new standards that landlords cannot ignore and create an authority with the power to enforce these rules.”

Story Cont. on Pg. 4

BNSI LABOUR FORCE SURVEY: EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY SHOWS PROMISE

Story Cont. from Pg. 1

The latest figures also continue a trend seen earlier in 2025. In the second quarter of 2025, the national unemployment rate measured 9.3 percent, an improvement from 10.8 percent recorded during the first quarter. The latest survey indicates that after those declines earlier in the year, unemployment remained relatively stable through the final two quarters while more Bahamians entered the workforce and secured employment.

The BNSI report further shows that the increase in employment was largely driven by workers in the country’s prime working-age population between 25 and 54 years, who accounted for more than 65 percent of total employment and contributed to the largest

share of employment growth. Employment among young people aged 15 to 24 also increased during the period. Although unemployment remained largely unchanged nationally, the survey found the total number of unemployed people declined slightly from 21,565 in the third quarter to 21,465 in the fourth quarter.

Much of that improvement occurred among people between 25 and 54 years old, while the youth unemployment rate remained relatively unchanged.

Another encouraging sign highlighted in the report was the decline in discouraged workers. The number of people who were available for work but had stopped actively searching because they

believed suitable jobs were unavailable fell from 3,115 in the third quarter to 2,640 in the fourth quarter, representing a 15.2 percent decrease. According to the BNSI, the reduction suggests that fewer Bahamians felt discouraged about finding employment.

Minister of Labour, Public Service and National Insurance Pia Glover-Rolle welcomed the findings, saying they demonstrate that employment opportunities are expanding across the country.

“The results from the latest Labour Force Survey confirm the Davis Administration’s expanding opportunities agenda is working, as consecutive quarters in the eight percent range represent the lowest sustained unemployment levels seen in many years,”

the minister said.

She noted that while thousands of additional Bahamians entered the labour force during the second half of the year, the economy generated enough jobs to absorb that increase, allowing the unemployment rate to remain steady.

“These figures tell us the jobs being created are keeping pace with the number of people looking for employment. That is not something we take for granted. It means our policies are working, and we must continue to work even harder to expand employment opportunities and bring discouraged workers back into the fold,” Glover-Rolle said.

The minister credited the results to three key priorities: expanding opportunities through education and skills train-

ing, creating jobs by attracting local and foreign investment while ensuring qualified Bahamians receive first consideration for available positions, and promoting economic growth throughout the Family Islands rather than concentrating opportunities solely in New Providence.

She added that billions of dollars in ongoing and planned investment projects across The Bahamas are expected to create additional employment opportunities in the months ahead, supported by initiatives such as the Labour on the Blocks Job Fairs, the Jobseekers Portal, the Notice of Vacancy Enforcement Unit, the National Training Agency, and the National Apprenticeship Programme.

The BNSI noted that

the Labour Force Survey remains the country’s principal source of official labour market data and provides policymakers, businesses and researchers with information on employment, unemployment, labour force participation and other key labour market trends.

This latest report suggests that while unemployment has levelled off following earlier declines in 2025, continued job creation and growing participation in the labour market that remained resilient throughout the second half of the year.

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BAHAMIANS CELEBRATE FLAG DAY

BY CLEMIA NEELY
Journal Staff Writer

Today is National Pride Day and with just one week to go before The Bahamas observes its 53rd anniversary of Independence on July 10th the celebrations began on Wednesday with Flag Day. Bahamian flags were proudly raised throughout the country, telling the story of a people who fought to make this Commonwealth a better place for all.

The celebrations started in Rawson Square in Downtown Nassau, where the streets were lined with black, gold, and aquamarine. Minister of Culture, Arts, and Heritage Hon. Leslia Miller-Brice described the event as a celebration of the pioneers whose courage and sacrifice laid the foundations of a free and sovereign land that Bahamians are proud to call home.

“Our heritage is not only something we inherited. It is something we must preserve, celebrate, and pass on with pride,” she explained. “Our national flag stands as a lasting symbol of that heritage. Its aquamarine reflects our seas, its gold, our natural riches, and its black triangle, the strength, resilience, and unity of the Bahamian people.”

Minister of Tourism Hon. Glenys Hanna-Martin echoed similar sentiments, adding that independence is a



Minister of Culture, Arts, and Heritage Hon. Leslia Miller-Brice and Minister of Tourism Hon. Glenys Hanna-Martin

shared responsibility that all Bahamians have a responsibility to protect. “We must never forget, in all that we do, the faithfulness of our God. We have come this far by faith. Today I thank God for this Bahama land. I salute this beautiful flag, and I pray that the years ahead will be the best years this nation has ever seen.”

The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth and Sports held their Flag Day Ceremony at the Ivy Dumont building, highlighting the importance of pride and unity across the Bahama land.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education, Science, and Technology Hon. Chester Cooper shared that the Bahamian flag represented a promising beginning towards a better Bahamas.

U.S. NORTHERN COMMAND DONATES MEDICAL EQUIPMENT TO THE BAHAMAS



Ministry of Health and Wellness officials are photographed with representatives of the U.S. Embassy Donation

BY: MAKEIRA TUCKER
Journal Staff Writer

The U.S. Northern Command donated about \$400,000 in generators, medical equipment and vehicles to the Ministry of Health and Wellness this week. Minister of Health and Wellness, Dr. Michael Darville, accepted the donation, expressing that the equipment will help strengthen the country’s healthcare system.

The donation, presented by U.S. Navy Commander Victor Laing, included eight generators, four small flatbed trucks, three utility carts and cardiac monitors. Laing said, “On behalf of Ambassador Herschel Walker at the US Embassy and General Greg Guillot of the United States Northern Command, and funded through the Overseas Humanitarian Disaster and Civic Aid program known as OHDACA, the United States is proud to formally donate a package of critical medical and logistical equipment to the Ministry of Health and Wellness of the Bahamas.”

“We begin with eight generators, three rated at 20 kilowatts, three at 30 kilowatts, and two at 40 kilowatts. These generators are not simply back up equipment; they’re a direct response to gaps identified during a recent hurricane preparedness review exercise conducted with the ministry,” Laing explained.

He continued, “Next were donating four small flatbed trucks. These vehicles will be made available to the Ministry of Health and Wellness; the Department of Public Health and Public Hospitals Authority and they will go to work immediately.” Laing explained that the ministry’s maintenance department workers have issues with reaching multiple locations throughout New Providence daily. Laing added, “The supplies unit needs reliable transport to collect and deliver goods and medical equipment; the biomedical engineering team must respond quickly when medical equipment in clinics requires attention.”

The donated gulf carts will be sent to the family islands to help improve mobility and healthcare delivery services within smaller communities. Laing stated, “We also donating three utility carts and I want to take a moment to speak of their significance, The Bahamas is not one community, its hundreds of communities spread across cays and islands each with its own health care needs.”

“These utility carts will be disrupted among three island communities, Harbour Island, Spanish Wells, Bimini and communities in Abaco,” he added.

In communities where vehicles aren’t necessary utility carts would provide transportation for staff. Laing expressed that, “In smaller communities’ mobility matters, these carts would help ensure that healthcare workers can move efficiently, respond promptly and serve their neighbors with speed and dignity the speed and dignity those neighbors deserve.”

Also included in the donation were four cardiac monitors and 18 cardiogram machines which will be used throughout New Providence and the Family Islands. Laing said, “The Ministry of Health and Wellness, to the Department of Public Health, to the Public Hospitals Authority, and to every healthcare worker who operates this equipment, this donation is for you and your patient.”

Darville thanked the United States for the donation while acknowledging that it came during an important time, with June 1st marking the beginning of the hurricane season. Darville stated, “This is a wonderful day for the Ministry of Health and Wellness.” “I can tell you that the supplies that is before us is well needed,” he explained.

The Minister believes that the new trucks will aid in the transportation of essential devices and equipment between polyclinics as the facilities expand their services and the electric cardiogram machines will assist with improving diagnostic capabilities. Darville expressed that the ministry is pleased to have a partner like NORTHCOM and grateful for what they have done for healthcare in the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.



GOVERNMENT TO REDUCE COST OF LIVING

Story Cont. from Pg. 3

Additionally, keeping in line with the government’s plans to have Bahamians own more of the country Mr. Davis said “the government will offer Bahamians the chance to own a piece of one of their own national institutions by placing up to a quarter of the ownership of Bank of The Bahamas directly into citizens’ hands. This is important because ownership is how we truly empower Bahamians. It’s how we get Bahamians to stop feeling like guests in their own country.”

The Prime Minister noted that the government held inflation to 0.6 percent last year while the rest of the world struggled.

Despite the Prime Minister and the government’s enthusiasm leader of the Opposition and free National Movement leader Michael Pintard and his party are not impressed by the contents of the speech from the throne, agreeing with the Member of Parliament for Long Island Dr. Andre Rollins that the speech was simply a “great public relations document.”

Mr. Pintard during his contribution to the resolution thanked and commended the Governor General for her grace and poise as she read the speech from the throne.

However, he said the speech should lay out the government’s plans and policies that the incoming administration intends to apply to the long list of challenges that the country is facing, plans and policies he said that should put Bahamian people in a better position to seize opportunities we have not yet achieved.

Mr. Pintard said, “We listened to the content of the speech intently and asked several questions that others have asked of us – did it address the matters that plague us? Did the speech make the path easier and clearer for our citizens and investors to create or to seize opportunities that would make our country globally competitive? Did the speech provide hope that we will reduce or end the pains that significant segments of this society are plagued with.

“Having been given another chance to govern in The Bahamas as we listened to the voice of this government through our governor, I must confess that I like many others found the speech from the throne underwhelming; we expected more. We deserve more. The speech contained much of the same tired promises undelivered in the four and a half years of government before,” said Mr. Pintard.

He, said the Opposition had hoped the government would have introduced in this new budget funds for a new independent fire department to combat what he described a “national challenge” throughout the Family Islands and to some extent New Providence and Grand Bahama.

The opposition leader also pointed out that the issue of the national investment fund would have been

addressed and whether the government would have given consideration to repealing and replacing a best-in-class sovereign wealth fund. He also said the Opposition would have liked to see a commitment to local government in New Providence.

Mr. Pintard said, “The challenges we face are many but we have the capacity as a people to meet them. The opportunities are many, and while many Bahamians have done well far too many are still seeking to realize their dreams and aspirations.”

Earlier in the debate Prime Minister Davis noted that these are “serious times” that call for serious leadership and not clowning and acting.

He extended an olive branch to the Opposition when he said, “I want to be clear about this; we expect disagreement in this House because that is a part of the work of a parliament. But while disagreement belongs in this chamber, distraction does not; and the matters before us are far too important to be cheapened by anyone who is more interested in making noise than they are in making progress.”

“So, I extend my hand across this floor to every member willing to meet this moment with the maturity it demands. Where there is common ground let’s stand on it, where there is disagreement let that disagreement be honest, and where there is work to be done let’s do it together,” said Mr. Davis.

Later in the day the Opposition leader gave the Prime Minister’s offer the stiff arm. He said, “I listened as he (Prime Minister) talked about joining hands and doing serious work. I was amazed that he had a serious disposition as he talked about integrity and wanting to end corruption in the country when it comes across as if he and the team is aiding and abetting it.”

Continuing he said, “Part of our job as opposition, in response to comments made by the Member for Cat Island, Rum Cay and San Salvador, our job is to make concrete recommendations that would improve the fortunes of our people, and we have been doing that. But its not to be cheerleaders as they would wish.”

On the crime front the nation’s leader said the very real fear of crime that impacts far too many communities throughout New Providence must be addressed.

“For years,” he said, “A parent sending their son out the door carried a fear no parent should know. The fear of crime is real and has been substantiated by years of violence that has stolen far too many promising lives away from us. Last year, murders in this country fell by 31 percent. To me, that isn’t just a statistic. That is a count of sons and daughters who made it back home each night. Major crime fell by 10 percent last year.”

Mr. Davis said the government’s five-pillar strategy is working. And the Clear, Hold, Build initiative is steadying the communities that needed it most.

DARVILLE: LONGEVITY THERAPY SET TO HELP INDIVIDUALS WITH PARKINSON’S DISEASE

Story Cont. from Pg. 2

I must speak plainly. Everywhere I go, people ask me, how many Bahamians are living with Parkinson’s disease? And the truth, Dr. Michael Darville, is I cannot answer that, she stated. We’ve been trying to get a questionnaire together for a while, but I cannot give a definitive answer. Not because the number is small, but because the data simply doesn’t exist.

Under the umbrella of

the global Parkinson’s Foundation, Kingdor proudly supports and collaborates with 45 centres of Excellence worldwide. These internationally recognized institutions lead groundbreaking research and clinical care, working tirelessly to unlock the mysteries of Parkinson’s disease and bring the world closer to ending this debilitating condition.

Mrs. Darling-Hill hopes to make localized, national research a reality

for The Bahamas.

This is why the Kingdor National Parkinson Foundation is calling for a formal partnership with the Ministry of Health and Wellness. We cannot plan what we cannot measure. We cannot support what we cannot see. And we cannot build a healthier Bahamas without knowing the true scope of the condition, she told the audience.

Minister of Health and Wellness Dr. Michael Darville commended Darling-Hill for the

foundation’s work. I can say one thing, that many people in the Commonwealth of The Bahamas are supporting the drive in the fight against Parkinson’s disease in our country, Dr. Darville said. While highlighting national efforts to improve healthcare systems, he formally accepted the call for collaboration to improve the data available on the disease.

PATHWAY TO PEACE PROGRAM AIMS TO BREAK CYCLE OF REOFFENDING

TYNIA BROWN
Journal Staff Writer

A prison rehabilitation initiative designed to equip inmates with conflict resolution and life skills is preparing for its second cohort in August after graduating its first group of participants this week.

Founder and facilitator Patrice Ellis said the idea for the Pathway to Peace program came unexpectedly while she was on a flight to California following devastating wildfires there.

Ellis explained that as she reflected on completing her university studies, she questioned how she could use the knowledge she had gained.

I literally had restorative integration and peer mediation come to my mind, " she said. I'd never heard of those before, so I started researching them.

That research eventually led her to the United Kingdom, where she studied peer mediation before developing the Bahamian program.

The inaugural eight-week course was offered to medium-security inmates selected by Bahamas Department of Corrections staff. Ellis said she was intentionally kept out of the selection process and did not know the participants or their offences.

Instead, the focus was on inmates preparing to re-enter society.

We know how problematic reintegration is, she said. People just don't trust us once they find out we've been in prison. The whole idea was to begin providing them with the life skills and tools they'll need when they get out.

One of the program's most emotional exercises involved participants holding guided one-on-one conversations with family members or loved ones who had been affected by their incarceration.

Ellis described those sessions as overwhelming but successful, saying they helped begin the process of rebuilding damaged relationships.

She stressed that the program's success will not be measured by certificates but by the choices participants make after their release.



Pathway To Peace Founder and Facilitator, Mrs. Patrice Ellis

The real success is in the decisions these young men and women make moving forward, she said.

Ellis believes the skills taught, such as active listening, communication, emotional regulation and conflict resolution, will extend beyond the graduates themselves.

She recalled one participant's sister saying she intended to use what she had learned during the family session with the rest of her family, demonstrating how the lessons could spread throughout communities.

The next cohort is scheduled to begin in August. Ellis said classes will remain limited to about 15 participants at a time to preserve the quality of instruction.

Although 15 inmates initially enrolled in the first cohort, 11 completed the program after four participants left midway to take up paid work opportunities within the correctional facility.

Speaking at the graduation ceremony, Attorney General Senator Wayne Munroe described the initiative as an important part of the government's rehabilitation strategy, noting that nearly all inmates will eventually return to society.

He said programs like Pathway to Peace are essential to reducing reoffending and helping former inmates become productive citizens.

Tourism Minister Glenys Hanna-Martin and Social Services Minister Barbara Cartwright were also in attendance to assist with the presentation of certificates to the graduates.

GOVERNMENT TO REDUCE COST OF LIVING

Story Cont. from Pg. 4

"The visionary pioneers who signed our constitution believed deeply in the fundamental principles of freedom, democracy, the supremacy of God, and the rule of law. The patriotism they displayed was defined by active sacrifice, bold courage, and a deep love for a country they could only then imagine." He went on to say, "So we've come a long way in a short time, and we ought to be very proud.

Today we enjoy the social and economic freedoms made possible by their sacrifices," he said.

Senator Keenan Johnson stated that we ought to be proud when we think about what our flag means to us. "So I'm saying to you that you guys should have pride because you are responsible for the growth of our youth, whether it's through education, or whether it's through the uplifting of youth and in term of sports."

"That is the charge that I have for you today. I want you to reflect on what you have done and what you continue to do to make this country proud. I'm proud of you guys and I want you to give yourselves a round of applause for what you have done to make this country better," Johnson said.

CULTURE TAKES CENTER STAGE AS BEAT RETREAT LAUNCHES THE BAHAMAS' 53RD INDEPENDENCE CELEBRATIONS



BELINDA WILSON ADDRESSES MPS SALARY INCREASE

BY CLEMIA NEELY
Journal Staff Writer

The Davis administration has drafted an amendment to the Parliamentarians Salaries and Allowances Act that would grant members of Parliament \$32,000 a year and senators \$16,000 a year in duty allowances, in addition to their salaries. MPs would receive a total of \$60,000 a year in salary and duty allowance and senators would receive \$28,500 a year. MPs currently receive a salary of \$28,000 a year while senators receive \$12,500.

"This bill seeks to amend the Parliamentarians Act to make clear that office holders such as the speaker, deputy speaker, president and vice-president of the Senate and other office holders are entitled to both the salary and allowance for their office and the pay of a member of the House of Assembly or senator," the bill states.

"This bill removes any doubt about entitlement, confirming eligibility for both payments and ensures that leadership or ministerial roles do not override the basic entitlements of parliamentary membership. Thus, promoting transparency and fairness in compensation for parliamentarians with multiple roles."

Following the news of this proposed bill, there has been backlash from the Bahamas Union of Teachers (BUT) President Belinda Wilson. She said that "it is unbelievable that the government seeks to do this while Bahamians are struggling to make ends meet as they are faced with rising gas prices, skyrocketing electricity bills, increasing food prices, and a high cost of living."

"A close review of many of the dubious declarations revealed that some candidates doubled their net worth and had hundreds of thousands of dollars cash in the bank, unlike the significant percentage of Bahamians who have less than \$1,000 in their bank accounts. Many MPs are now self-declared millionaires," she said.

Wilson said that there are over 2,000 members of the BUT who are eagerly awaiting an acceptable salary package for their new industrial agreement for the period 2025-2030. She reminds the government that they are all where they are right now because of a teacher.

"Many teachers and public servants are still waiting for years for their confirmation back pay that they have already worked for. When will these workers be paid? Teachers are awaiting their rental allowance, hardship allowance, disturbance allowance, coaching allowances for duties already



Bahamas Union of Teachers (BUT) President Belinda Wilson

performed. When will they receive their duty allowances?" she asked.

She urges the Prime Minister to ensure that the new industrial agreement between the government and the BUT is completed, signed, and registered before he even dreams of increasing the government's salaries.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education, Science, and Technology Chester Cooper addressed the complaints launched by BUT President. "We are close to reaching an agreement," he explained. "I believe most of the financial terms are, in fact, agreed. We are in active engagement with the BUT and President Wilson, as well as the Ministry of Finance on these matters. We are confident that we are going to reach an agreement soon."

As it relates to the MP salaries, he clarified that it is determined by the Cabinet and the House of Assembly. "What I believe the Union may be referencing is something that they do themselves as it relates to ensuring equity, fairness, parity with payers in the region, etc. I'm confident that all is going to be well, certainly in terms of the industrial agreement for the BUT. We are in active negotiations with several other unions."

DPM Cooper says that he is blessed to have the opportunity as Minister of Education to negotiate with several unions, and he is looking forward to this collaboration.



A TASTE OF THE BAHAMAS IN WASHINGTON: DIPLOMACY, CULTURE, AND CELEBRATION AT THE NEW EMBASSY

Washington's diplomatic community is accustomed to cultural receptions and embassy gatherings, but every so often an event manages to transcend protocol and offer something more memorable: a genuine glimpse into the soul of a nation. Such was the atmosphere at the opening reception of the new Embassy of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas in Washington, D.C., where guests were welcomed not simply into a diplomatic space, but into a celebration of Bahamian identity, hospitality, and cultural pride.

Held in the embassy's beautifully prepared outdoor garden, the evening attracted diplomats, government officials, professionals, community leaders, and friends of The Bahamas. "From the moment I arrived," said our contributor Yabsira Kuraz, "there was a warmth to the occasion that felt distinctly Caribbean. Conversations flowed easily, music drifted through the air, and the gathering carried the relaxed elegance for which The Bahamas is known around the world."

One of the evening's most significant moments came with remarks from His Excellency Wendall K. Jones, Ambassador of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas to the United States. Welcoming guests to the new diplomatic mission, Ambassador Jones emphasized the importance of international friendship, cultural exchange, and the growing relationship between The Bahamas and the United States.

His remarks set the tone for an evening that was as much about connection as it was celebration. "The

opening of an embassy is more than the inauguration of a building," one attendee remarked during the reception. "It represents a bridge between nations and people."

Throughout the evening, guests were invited to discover the traditions that make The Bahamas one of the Caribbean's most vibrant cultural destinations. Among the highlights was an interactive presentation of Junkanoo, the country's iconic cultural festival celebrated annually on Boxing Day and New Year's Day.

A colorful Junkanoo costume was displayed for guests, offering a rare opportunity to experience one of the most recognizable symbols of Bahamian heritage. Attendees were encouraged to try on the elaborate costume, pose for photographs, and join performers in dancing to traditional rhythms. The experience proved irresistible.

Laughter filled the garden as guests embraced the festive spirit, creating moments that felt far removed from the formal settings often associated with diplomatic events.

Music played a central role throughout the evening. Traditional Bahamian songs performed by local musicians transformed the embassy grounds into a lively cultural showcase. The performances provided visitors with an authentic introduction to the sounds and traditions of the islands, while encouraging interaction between guests and members of the Bahamian community.

As the evening progressed, performers presented a

festival-inspired cultural showcase featuring colorful attire, energetic dancing, and audience participation. Guests were invited to learn traditional dance movements and join in the celebration, further reinforcing the welcoming spirit that defined the event. For many attendees, it was the closest thing to being transported to Nassau without boarding a plane. The culinary offerings were equally memorable. Guests enjoyed a selection of Bahamian-inspired refreshments and beverages, including wine, beer, and coconut-flavored rum. Conversations with embassy staff and members of the Bahamian diaspora provided additional insight into local traditions, customs, and daily life across the islands.

One particularly festive touch was a beautifully designed cake inspired by the Bahamian flag, which was later shared among guests and quickly became a popular gathering point throughout the evening.

Beyond the cultural presentations, the reception also served as an important networking opportunity. Diplomats, business leaders, cultural advocates, and members of Washington's international community mingled throughout the evening, exchanging ideas and building new connections.

Among those present was Ashley Munroe Cargill, Second Secretary and Vice Consul at the Embassy of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas. During conversation, she spoke about an upcoming cultural program at the Kennedy Center that will feature Bahamian artists and performers.

The event, which will be open to the public, reflects the embassy's continued commitment to sharing Bahamian culture with American audiences and fostering greater appreciation for the country's artistic traditions.

What distinguished the reception was its ability to balance diplomacy with authenticity. Rather than simply presenting information about the country, the embassy created an immersive experience that allowed guests to engage directly with Bahamian culture through music, dance, cuisine, conversation, and personal interaction.

By the end of the evening, visitors left with more than an introduction to a new diplomatic mission. They departed with a deeper understanding of The Bahamas itself; a nation of more than 700 islands whose cultural richness extends far beyond its world-famous beaches and turquoise waters.

The reception demonstrated how diplomacy can serve as a platform not only for international relations but also for cultural understanding. Through hospitality, storytelling, and celebration, the Embassy of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas successfully brought a piece of the islands to the heart of Washington.

For one evening, the distance between the Caribbean and the American capital felt remarkably small.

