

Speech from the Throne



Governor-General Sir Cornelius A Smith reads the Speech from The Throne marking the opening of a new session of Parliament.

Governor-General Sir Cornelius A Smith reads the Speech from the Throne on Wednesday, October 6, 2021 at Baha Mar's convention centre.

Here is the full speech:

Madame President and Honourable Senators,

Madame Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly:

Just twenty days ago, my Government was elected with a mandate to bring about a “New Day” in our Bahamas. It is clear from the results of the election that Bahamians demand transformational change.

My Government comes into governance with our country in the midst of mismanaged health and economic crises.

My Government is committed to work in partnership with other nations, with our local communities and, most importantly, with the Bahamian people to address the challenges that these crises pose.

Today My Government proposes our “Blue Print for Change”.

My Government will consult and be inclusive in our decision-making.

As a first priority, my Government will, therefore, introduce legislation and policies to fully address future major health risks to avoid the need for Emergency Orders.

My Government is committed to executing good governance, established on the principles of Transparency, Integrity & Accountability.

Madame President and Honourable Senators,

Madame Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly:

My Government fully understands that we cannot resolve our country's economic crisis until we have resolved the health crisis. The COVID-19 crisis has exposed many of the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of our healthcare system.

My Government will make investments in healthcare infrastructure throughout The Bahamas and ensure that Family Island clinics are properly equipped, inclusive of the capacity for telemedicine.

My Government will build new hospitals in New Providence and Grand Bahama through public-private partnerships.

My Government will prioritize public health and wellness initiatives and will move aggressively to introduce catastrophic healthcare insurance to make healthcare more affordable, and to address the mental health issues in our country.

My Government also recognizes, applauds, and expresses its gratitude to the doctors, nurses, other frontline workers and volunteers for their meritorious and selfless service during this pandemic.

Madame President and Honourable Senators,

Madame Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly:

The present economic crisis has left a trail of unprecedented misery among the Bahamian people and our public finances in a dismal state.

Despite this bleak outlook, my Government will introduce measures that will bring immediate relief to the Bahamian people and to businesses.

My Government will amend the VAT Act to lower the rate of VAT across the board to 10 percent.

Madame President and Honourable Senators,

Madame Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly:

My Government will focus on issues that will rescue, restore, and strengthen the economy.

My Government will pursue strategies to address the infrastructural needs of the country.

My Government will pursue measures to stabilize public finances and increase public revenue.

My Government will implement a Debt Management Plan to address the historic debt burden and deficit.

My Government will amend 'The Procurement Act' to strengthen provisions for Bahamian participation in Government Procurement at all levels.

My Government will amend 'The Fiscal Responsibility Act' to strengthen the independence of the Fiscal Responsibility Council.

My Government will amend 'The Public Financial Management Act' to ensure full compliance with all existing legislation.

My Government will amend the 'Commercial Enterprises Act' to ensure that when jobs are being filled, Bahamians receive the highest priority.

My Government will also introduce measures to encourage renewable energy industries in solar, wind, wave and ocean thermal energy.

My Government re-commits The Bahamas to a minimum reliance on renewable energy by thirty percent by 2030.

My Government will introduce a 'Merchant Shipping Bill' to bring our jurisdiction in line with its international obligations, contemporary practices, and to enhance our competitive edge in the global maritime industry.

My Government will promote Grand Bahama to harness the power of the maritime industry.

My Government strongly commits to introducing a number of initiatives to support the growth and development of the Cultural and Creative economy.

Madame President and Honourable Senators,

Madame Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly:

My Government will introduce measures to employ Junkanoo Culture and the visual performing arts to drive exports in music, costumes and art.

My Government will re-launch and formalize the "Sports in Paradise" programme to encourage major international sports federations and leagues to use The Bahamas as a base.

Madame President and Honourable Senators,

Madame Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly:

My Government is committed to achieving greater food security and reducing our reliance on imports as a matter of priority.

My Government will introduce a regulatory framework for the Cannabis Industry.

Madame President and Honourable Senators,

Madame Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly:

My Government will introduce legislation to facilitate a comprehensive programme of digitization for the country.

Madame President and Honourable Senators,

Madame Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly:

My Government will restructure the Bahamas Investment Authority to streamline application processes and develop a new marketing strategy.

My Government consult with key stakeholders and appropriately amend legislation to provide increased tax incentives and concessions for domestic investors.

My Government will transform approval processes and launch BahamasInvest to retain competitiveness and mobilise local and international investors to grow the economy.

My Government will return tourism to pre-Covid levels by harnessing existing markets.

My Government will develop an investment portfolio for the Family Islands to promote an investor-friendly environment with a focus on an investment portfolio for specialised industries.

My Government will undertake infrastructural upgrades throughout all of the Islands of The Bahamas in an effort to create investment portfolios.

My Government will expand the provision of potable water and implement a national strategy for the management of water as a natural resource.

The Government will introduce a new and progressive Building Code to increase resilience in the face of Climate Change.

The Government will expedite the development of the airports in Exuma, Grand Bahama, and North Eleuthera and will advance the development of all major airports across The Bahamas through Public Private Partnerships.

Madame President and Honourable Senators,

Madame Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly

Even as we vigorously pursue avenues of progress throughout our country, my Government is mindful that we will not leave behind the most vulnerable or discouraged people in our society.

My Government will enhance social assistance programmes.

My Government in collaboration with the private sector and nongovernmental organisations will implement immediate relief measures for Abaco, Grand Bahama and Ragged Island.

Through partnerships with Social Services, Urban Renewal and Civil Society, including the churches, my Government will work to ensure that every Bahamian has life skills, food to eat, clean water and a roof over their heads.

My Government will increase the pension for Senior Citizens.

My Government will introduce legislation for the protection of consumers.

My Government will increase the minimum wage and phase in a liveable wage.

My Government will increase the benefits for persons with disabilities and ensure that the provisions of the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Act are fully implemented and enforced.

My Government will re-introduce the RISE programme which provided substantial benefits to many families.

My Government will work with all stakeholders to bring relief to mortgage and rent payers to prevent an increase in and reduce homelessness.

My Government will introduce legislation to provide for the establishment of an Urban Renewal Authority to improve the quality of life of residents throughout The Bahamas.

My Government will create a national Second-Chance' jobs programme that allows those who have served prison time to enter the job market.

As a part of the Second Chance Programme, my Government will expunge the records of those young people convicted of minor offences related to the use of marijuana, so that they may more easily re-join the formal, productive economy.

Madame President and Honourable Senators,

Madame Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly:

My Government is fully committed to ensuring that the citizens of The Bahamas feel safe and secure and will address Crime and its associated social ills by adopting a holistic and multifaceted approach.

My Government will continue to strengthen the Royal Bahamas Police Force to battle crime and preserve the peace; and the Royal Bahamas Defence Force to better defend our territorial sovereignty.

My Government will transform The Bahamas Department of Correctional Services into a rehabilitative institution in alignment with its mandate.

My Government, after the broadest consultation with stakeholders, will seek to reform the electoral process in The Bahamas.

Madame President and Honourable Senators,

Madame Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly:

My Government is fully committed to ensuring that our economy works for all Bahamians.

My Government will amend the Hotels Encouragement Act to provide better incentives for Bahamian-owned and joint venture boutique hotels and related tourism offerings.

My Government will introduce legislation to create tax incentives for small and medium-sized enterprises owned by Bahamians.

My Government will re-establish harmonious tripartite relations between Labour, Employers, and the Government.

My Government will ensure that all labour issues are addressed as a matter of priority.

My Government will advance the overall effectiveness of the Public Service through the expansion of training programs to assist in proper skill set placement customer service and revenue enhancement, also by implementing digitization to provide efficiency in clearing backlogs within the Ministry and Public Service Commission.

In handling the accumulation of pending matters, my Government will create room for new matters to be addressed immediately and consistently.

Madame President and Honourable Senators,

Madame Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly:

My Government considers housing to be a basic right. Through programmes and policies it will increase access to affordable homes.

New subdivisions will be developed using public-private partnerships. My Government will return to building houses for Bahamians.

Madame President and Honourable Senators,

Madame Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly:

My Government will work to ensure that the natural resources of The Bahamas benefit our people.

My Government will strengthen legislation that established a Sovereign Wealth Fund.

My Government proposes that all of its non-financial assets will be held in this fund for the benefit of generations of Bahamians.

My Government will provide the legal, fiscal and regulatory framework with the creation of the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment.

My Government will secure Carbon Credit payments for our natural resources.

Madame President and Honourable Senators,

Madame Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly:

My Government strongly reaffirms that universal and equitable access to quality education is key to our national development and to the fulfilment of each person potentiality.

My Government is fully committed to support every young person in overcoming obstacles to digital learning, and to restore in-person lessons as soon as it is safe and practicable with health guidance.

My Government will also establish programmes for monitoring and assisting high school dropouts so that immediate action is taken to ensure they continue to contribute to society as productive citizens.

My Government will introduce measures to offer expand the curriculum offering and incorporate educational models that build character, promote self-esteem and foster good citizenship for a deeper understanding and appreciation of our history.

My Government will ensure that the gap in access to education caused by COVID-19 prevention protocols is closed with a comprehensive remediation programme to ensure that no child is left behind.

My Government will create Magnet Schools and specialty institutes for science, technology, engineering, the visual and performing arts, mathematics, financial literacy and entrepreneurship.

My Government will amend the Education Act to provide for universal pre-primary education for three- and four-year olds, consolidate the National Accreditation and Equivalency Council of The Bahamas (NAECOB) and the Preschool and Day Care Council, and specify home-schooling modalities.

Madame President and Honourable Senators,

Madame Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly:

The good health and well-being of our youth is of prime concern to my Government. My Government will invest in their development, encourage and support their participation in national life, and provide and promote opportunities for their future.

My Government will create national programmes that tackle new threats to the well-being of young people, including issues of mental health, lack of self-confidence and identity, excessive social media consumption, and national identity and unity.

My Government will create a National First-Job' programme that allows young people between the age of 16–25 to gain a one-year Government subsidised placement in a field of national priority, including the new economies and trade.

My Government will launch the Community Youth Service, and offer stipends for young Bahamians, to provide service to NGOs and community groups. This can build a vital bridge between school and the job market.

My Government will establish a National Youth Guard in order for young people to receive technical training enabling them to serve in a Disaster Response Corps.

Madame President and Honourable Senators,

Madame Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly:

My Government will capitalize on the ongoing successes of the industrial sector on Grand Bahama and use the investment arm of the Ministry for Grand Bahama to create a one-stop shop to attract new local and direct foreign investment by way of duty-free concessions across the entire island.

Family Island Affairs and Local Government are priorities for my Government. My Government will develop strategic plans for each island.

My Government will work towards the finalisation of a Local Government Act for New Providence.

My Government will empower Local Government with revenue-raising powers and share jurisdiction over local affairs and community management and development.

My Government will increase the budget for Local Government Councils during our five-year term.

Madame President and Honourable Senators,

Madame Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly:

My Government will not tolerate corruption and is committed to introducing effective anticorruption legislation.

My Government will govern for the many, not for the few, and promote the best interests of Bahamians and The Bahamas.

My Government will increase accountability and transparency.

My Government will fully implement the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act.

Measures will be introduced to amend the rules of the House of Assembly to enable fixed sessions of parliament.

My Government will pursue a foreign policy that promotes and upholds our founding principles of democracy, human rights, and non-interference.

My Government will strengthen its engagement with the international community, becoming more strategic and deliberative in our participation in regional and international organisations.

In collaboration with neighbouring countries, my Government will work to strengthen our maritime borders, and seek regional solutions to common issues such as migration.

My Government will deepen our relations with our bilateral and international partners and bring focused attention to the promotion of trade and investment, and the provision of technical assistance.

My Government will expand its reach in the global community by opening Consulates and Embassies, including the appointment of Honorary Consuls and Non-Resident Envoys in key areas of the world to ensure that our interests are promoted and protect.

Madame President and Honourable Senators,

Madame Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly:

These are the policies and plans upon which my Government will legislate in order to bring about a New Day in The Bahamas.

We look forward to working in partnership with the Bahamian people to bring about a healthier, wealthier and wiser society.

I pray that the blessings of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels.

Source: Eyewitness News Bahamas