



NEW YEAR'S NATIONAL ADDRESS

THE MOST HON. DR. HUBERT MINNIS
PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF FINANCE



12 JANUARY 2021

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*The Most Hon. Dr. Hubert Minnis,
Prime Minister and Minister of Finance*

Good evening, and a belated Happy New Year.

This past Monday we celebrated the attainment of Majority Rule, which was achieved after generations of struggle.

Majority Rule is one of our greatest achievements as a people.

It ushered in greater equality and the flourishing of our democracy upon which, we continue to build as a free and sovereign people.

Dear Fellow-Bahamians:

This year's New Year's Address, is unlike any a Bahamian prime minister has had to give.

Tonight, I want to let you know about the very difficult state of affairs in which we continue to find ourselves, because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

But, I also wish to report that there is good news.

COVID-19 VACCINE

NATIONAL CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

I am pleased to announce this evening, that I have appointed the COVID-19 Vaccine National Consultative Committee.

The **primary purpose of the Committee is to advise the Ministry of Health**, in support of the National COVID-19 Vaccination Plan.

This Committee is chaired by Dr. Merceline Dahl-Regis, OD, CMG, and is made up of public health experts and representatives of various sectors, including religious and community leaders.

Government officials will report at the appropriate time on the roll out of a vaccine in The Bahamas.



My Fellow Bahamians:

2020, was one of the most difficult years in living memory.

The global pandemic has killed nearly two million people, and made millions of others seriously ill, some with severe and long-term consequences.

COVID devastated economies. It kept us away from our loved ones.

Almost overnight, a new reality descended on the world and on The Bahamas.

The pandemic has left many in states of grief, financial hardship and poor mental health.

We continue to mourn those we have lost and we continue to pray for those affected by the virus.

COVID-19 has interrupted our Bahamian way of life, with thousands of Bahamians still out of work.

Tourism came to a near halt during the first wave, leading to hotel closures and the complete shutdown of our cruise industry.

This extraordinary global crisis has required us as a people to summon our greatest resolve.

I am very proud of the many, many Bahamians who worked together in a spirit of love and unity and who have followed the public health guidelines for nearly a year.

The emotional toll of this pandemic has been overwhelming and painful.



This extraordinary global crisis has required us as a people to summon our greatest resolve.

A grandmother who has not hugged her grandchildren for nearly a year, put it best when she said: **“It is time for COVID to be over.”**

Thankfully, because there are now successful vaccines for COVID-19, our country and our economy are set to reopen more fully in the months ahead.

I say to that grandmother and to all Bahamians:

The end is in sight!
Restrictions will end!
We will get back to our way of life!
Jobs and the economy are coming back!

Last month some hotel workers returned to their jobs.

But we still have a few more months to go, especially as the pandemic continues to rage in countries all around us.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:
Our main priority during this pandemic was to save and to protect lives, which is still my greatest priority.

The pandemic caused many in our country to be confronted with difficult decisions.

How do I feed my family?
How will I pay my rent, or my mortgage?
Do I have enough money to afford my medication?
Will I be able to put gas in my car?
How do I keep my business afloat?

Many have had to spend their savings.
Many hard-working Bahamians needed the assistance of their government.

Just as my Government was determined to save lives, we are just as determined to help those of us in need.

To support our fellow countrymen, your Government spent over **\$177 million through the end of October 2020**, on our comprehensive COVID-19 response.

The closure of much of our economy caused an immediate financial shock to many families.

To help to support businesses and workers, we offered \$44.4 million in tax credit/tax deferrals which funded the payrolls for nearly **7,000 private-sector employees.**

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*The Most Hon. Dr. Hubert Minnis,
Prime Minister and Minister of Finance*

Small Businesses

Small businesses are part of the heart and soul of the Bahamian economy.

To protect nearly 4,500 jobs in the small business sector, \$47.3 million was made available for small business grants and continuity loans, through the **Access Accelerator Small Business Development Center**.

\$47.3 MILLION

was made available for small business grants and continuity loans

\$45.5 MILLION

in unemployment support



National Insurance Board, Baillou Hill Road

Unemployment Support

The Government provided **\$45.5 million in unemployment support**, administered by the National Insurance Board.

This included the extension of NIB's existing benefit programs, as well as support for Bahamians in the hospitality sector and self-employed individuals.

This has been the **largest distribution of unemployment benefits in Bahamian history**.

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Food Distribution

The Government brought together the major food aid organizations, and **funded the largest food distribution effort in Bahamian history.**

\$17.2 million in food support, has been spent between March and October 2020, providing food for approximately 100,000 people to date.

While we note the decline in new COVID-19 positive cases since its peak in the summer months, we are also painfully aware, that it will take time to rebuild our economy and to restore livelihoods.

To ensure that Bahamian families continue to be supported as the economy reopens and Bahamians return to work, **my Government has pledged to continue the unemployment assistance support, to the end of January 2021, and food assistance to the end of March 2021.**

\$17.2 Million
in food support.



Lend a Hand Bahamas



Nurse at PMH

Health Care

Further, to help boost our public health care facilities, in order to protect and to save lives, **the Government provided \$20 million in contingency funding.**

These funds, covered the cost for medical equipment and supplies, ensuring suitable quarantine facilities if needed, and other measures to ensure the country was equipped to combat the spread of the virus.

We significantly boosted contact tracing and lab capacity, to process COVID tests.

\$20 Million
in contingency funding.

Here on **New Providence, \$9 million** has been spent on major improvements to the Princess Margaret Hospital and areas of Sandilands Rehabilitation Centre.

The Elizabeth Estates Clinic and the South Beach Health Centre, were upgraded to strengthen capacity, for the delivery of urgent care services at the community level.

The Government also boosted the South Beach Health Centre to care for COVID-19 patients.



New Providence
\$9 Million

spent on major improvements to various health care facilities

Capacity was added to PMH, including a modular unit, and treatment and isolation unit provided by Samaritan's Purse.

On **Grand Bahama, \$21 million** has been allocated for the phased redevelopment of **Rand Memorial Hospital**.



Grand Bahama
\$21 Million

allocated for the phased redevelopment of **Rand Memorial Hospital**.

Rand Memorial Hospital



Ladies and gentlemen:

To **help in the education of our children and young people** during the pandemic, in 2020 alone, the Government in partnership with the private sector, purchased thousands of tablets and laptops for distribution across the country. In June 2020, the Ministry of Education, purchased **5,880 tablets**, as well as Wi-Fi devices for students on the Lunch Program.

The Ministry of Education is in the process of purchasing an additional 5,000 tablets for students in junior high schools. All **students and teachers** on the following Family Island communities, were provided with devices for the new school year: Mayaguana, Inagua, Acklins, Crooked Island, San Salvador, Rum Cay, Cat Island, and on Andros, for the communities of Congo Town, and Mangrove Cay.

Ladies and Gentlemen: In terms of the COVID-19 virus, our situation remains generally good at this time. We have had lower case numbers for many weeks. However, **we must all remember the pandemic is not over.** We must continue to wear our mask, social distance and regularly sanitize.

Internationally, more infectious variants of the virus have evolved and been detected. **It is possible that cases will rise again before vaccines arrive.** If this happens, as a Government and people, we will have to return to some of the measures that worked, to beat back previous waves.

Through our experience during the pandemic year, we now know the formula that works. **Tough times do not scare us.** Difficult circumstances do not break our resolve. Coming out of the awful pandemic year, we are working hard every day to ensure you have a brighter future. We are working to help businesses to stay open, and to reopen. We are working to provide new capital, to help entrepreneurs take risks and expand our economy.

In the weeks ahead, I will have even more to say about our economy. I note for now, that **international investment projects** for 2020, totaled more than **\$1 billion dollars.**

At the upcoming Bahamas Business Outlook, I will also offer an update on the post-Hurricane Dorian recovery in Abaco, as well other national developments.

The **massive redevelopment of Downtown Nassau** continues, with approximately **\$1 billion** worth of projects, which will help to revitalize our city center, and tourism services and product. The new **U.S. Embassy**, at a cost of approximately **\$318 million**, is taking shape. **The Bahamas Mortgage Corporation** has moved into a beautifully restored building, at East Hill Street.

The demolition of the old **Main Post Office** is nearing completion. A new **Supreme Court complex** will eventually be built on that site. The buildings on the site of the **old Queen Victoria Hotel** will be demolished shortly. In that space, will be the new **Central Bank** building.

At **Prince George's Wharf**, there will be a **\$250 million port redevelopment**, which will become the world-renowned, and new **Nassau Cruise Port.** A new **Cabinet Office** will be built at the site of the existing one.

Government House is going through significant renovations and over time, its building and gardens, will be refurbished and beautified. Phase One of the new **Southern Recreation Grounds** is open.

The \$200 million-plus, **The Pointe** project is nearing completion in Downtown Nassau. The revitalization of Downtown represents **jobs and economic recovery.** They also symbolize a new day for the City of Nassau, for New Providence and for The Bahamas, after the horrible pandemic of 2020.

With God's grace and guidance, 2021 is going to be a much better year for our country.



*“Where we are today, with more openness and lower virus numbers, proves that the **tough choices** we made throughout this crisis were **the right ones to protect Bahamians.**”*



The Most Hon. Dr. Hubert Minnis, Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, visits police at the Quakoo Street Police Station



The Most Hon. Dr. Hubert Minnis, Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, visits nurses at the Elizabeth Estates Clinic

Ladies and gentlemen: The policies my Government put forward during the pandemic, slowed the spread of the virus. Most Bahamians did a wonderful job following the guidelines. Consequently, we were able to have a generally open, and safe Christmas.

Over the many months of the pandemic we used various restrictions to save lives, and to limit the spread of the virus. We made the difficult decision to implement curfews and restrictions, to reduce infections and to **keep Bahamians safe.**

As a medical doctor, I learned it is necessary to take sometimes bitter medicine early, so the illness can be stopped before it is too late. While we were working hard with the health professionals to keep Bahamians safe, some were taking public positions to advance their political agendas, and they criticized us at every turn.

Where we are today, with more openness and lower virus numbers, proves that the tough choices we made throughout this crisis, were the right ones to protect Bahamians. During the pandemic year, we learned together how to beat back this virus when surges emerge.

Let me again thank our frontline workers.

This includes our healthcare professionals, and other workers in food stores, pharmacies, police and defence force, and other service professionals who **saved lives** and **kept our country running.**

Dear brothers and sisters:

In all things, and at all times, let us give thanks to Almighty God, the source of life, our comforter in times of need.

May I end this evening, with this prayer that was recently sent to me? I believe, it is a wonderful prayer for a New Year:

“**Look back and trust God.
Look forward and trust God.
Look around and serve God.
Look within and find God.**”

May God bless you and your families, and may the God of New Beginnings, bless us with a New Year filled with abundant new life. Thank you for listening. Good evening.

May God bless our Commonwealth!

*Tough times **do not scare us.** Difficult circumstances **do not break our resolve.** Coming out of the awful pandemic year, we are working hard every day to ensure you have a **brighter future.***



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