



Press Conference Notes
The Most Hon. Dr. Hubert Minnis
Prime Minister
Monday, 24 August 2020
5:00 P.M.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Press:

I want to provide the country and the media with a number of updates on our comprehensive efforts to address the COVID-19 pandemic, which is in its second wave in The Bahamas.

Let me begin by offering condolences to the family of Ms. Bernadette Rolle, a Registered Nurse at the Sandilands

Rehabilitation Centre (SRC). Nurse Rolle was COVID 19 positive.

As the Minister of Health previously said:
“We mourn the loss of a brave warrior from the frontline in our fight against the pandemic COVID-19.

The nation is grateful for her service and for all of those on the frontlines of this battle.

“Nurse Rolle was dedicated to her family, to her patients, and to the institutions of nursing and the Sandilands Rehabilitation Centre.”

I once again offer condolences to the families, friends and colleagues of those who have lost loved ones because of COVID-19.

We continue to pray for all of those who are in hospital, including the Leader of the Opposition, the Hon. Philip Brave Davis; Senator, the Hon. Michael Darville; and the

Member of Parliament for Central and South Eleuthera, Hank Johnson, who has been discharged from hospital, and is now in quarantine.

We pray for the recovery and healing of all who are COVID-positive.

I ended my own period of quarantine this morning. I wish to report that I am COVID negative.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Our plan and strategy from the very beginning of the pandemic was to utilize a range of public health tools to get the highly contagious COVID-19 virus under sufficient control in order to gradually re-open our economy and society, and to return to some level of growth and normalcy.

In the past few weeks we have been fighting our second wave of the global pandemic.

Earlier today, a press statement was released with changes to the Emergency Orders for Grand Bahama and various Family Islands that take effect tomorrow morning.

This information was made available earlier today for the residents of those islands, the Bahamian public, the media and various Island Administrators.

It was released so that residents of those islands can begin preparing for opening businesses tomorrow morning, as in the

case of Grand Bahama, and to adjust to the restrictions that regrettably have become necessary on some of our Southern islands.

These changes are available at the Office of the Prime Minister website, opm.gov.bs.

In the battle against this virus, your Government uses a wide range of public health tools.

Our public health team has preached their message for months: stay physically distant; wear masks when out; wash or

sanitize your hands regularly; sanitize high-frequency touch areas.

We release our COVID-19 dashboard daily.

You have seen the large numbers of cases in New Providence the past few weeks.

We put in place restrictive measures to slow the spread. These included curfews and days when certain types of shopping were not permitted.

I made a lockdown order last Monday to reduce the spread of COVID-19 on New Providence.

As your Prime Minister my main responsibility is to protect Bahamian lives. I take this responsibility seriously.

The decision taken was based on data available and health professionals' recommendations, at that time.

I made the order with immediate effect.

Right away Bahamians contacted me and said they needed more time. We listened.

The lockdown order was amended the next day to give New Providence residents the time they needed to prepare.

This extended national emergency is the worst crisis in our history since Independence.

Like other countries, we are learning in real time what policies work and the ones that do not.

When we saw the early data on the number of cases here in New Providence we were certain that there would be a need for additional restrictive measures.

Over the last 24 hours our health team and the University of The Bahamas further reviewed the latest data coming in and that new analysis has shifted the recommendation.

I am happy to tell you that the health team sees positive trends developing regarding the situation in New Providence. At this time a hard lockdown is no longer recommended for New Providence.

But I must say to you, that if the data points to the need for other restrictions in the future to address community spread, such restrictions will be put in place.

There is still no vaccine for this virus.

The very latest data has led to the following recommendations by our health professionals and decisions of the Government:

To continue to slow the current spread of the virus on New Providence, the current provisions that are in place will remain in place until 5 a.m., Monday 31st August 2020.

In order to give business owners time to put the necessary measures in place, and to

be able to properly plan your activities, please note that effective 5 a.m., Monday, 31st August 2020, many businesses on New Providence will be able to resume normal activity with appropriate physical distancing measures.

For example:

- Restaurants will be able to provide outdoor dining, curbside service, take away and delivery services.

- Both the Fish Fry and Potters Cay Dock will be permitted to offer curb side, takeaway and delivery services;
- Construction activities and hardware stores will continue as usual;
- Other retailers will be permitted to offer curb side and delivery services;

- Offices and other businesses will be permitted to operate with physical distancing restrictions.
- Individuals will be permitted to exercise during 5 a.m. to 9 a.m. Beaches will also be opened 5 a.m. to 9 a.m. daily.

This list of businesses and social activities is not exhaustive. The full list of services and businesses details will be listed

in the revised Orders which will be announced.

We will continue to monitor and analyse the data during the course of the coming week.

If the data points to it we will announce the relaxation of some other measures.

We are committed to a measured phased re-opening of the economy and society, based on specific health metrics.

It is hoped that this will aid the public, to gauge when there may be more relaxed or more restrictive measures.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

We are all living through the worst economic crisis in more than 70 years.

I will give a major National Address with emphasis on the economy in short order.

We are working on a revised detailed phased plan to boost jobs and economic

growth domestically, even as we plan for the reopening of our vital tourism sector, which is dependent on conditions at home and abroad.

Early in the pandemic, I established an Economic Recovery Committee.

This Committee is providing the government with advice and recommendations to position the country to emerge from this economic crisis, as rapidly as possible.

The Economic Recovery Committee will deliver its full report in September as planned.

Even as the ERC is working through its final report, it has provided to my office several interim recommendations and considerations to help focus on the immediate situation.

It is essential to reopen the domestic economy as soon as possible, with the reopening of the external economy to follow

as soon as feasible given the economic conditions overseas.

We are seeking to ensure that reopening is subject to established COVID-19 protocols.

The government agencies and private sector stakeholders must commit to greater adherence and compliance to established safety standards.

Based on the ERC's recommendations, we are preparing a strategy to approve all pending viable private sector and construction projects that are currently under consideration, and to fast track those approvals.

The approval and execution of these projects will generate immediate employment and business opportunities for Bahamian contractors and trade professionals.

The Government is accelerating the execution of the budgeted public infrastructure and construction projects, and will pay special attention to the smaller scale projects that benefit multiple smaller contractors.

This will allow for increased employment in many vulnerable segments of the economy and benefit a number of Bahamian small firms.

The Government is also looking at ways to provide special support for the creative community, and further support for Bahamian small businesses and entrepreneurs to provide them with the resources and expertise to be able to showcase and deliver their products to the world.

As I indicated above, I will give a National Address to provide full details on the Government's way forward concerning our economy.

As with every other country, there will be no 'quick fix' to this grave global economic situation.

But provided we all are prepared to move out of our collective comfort zone and undo the constraints that have too often defined us for decades, we can and we will shape a future Bahamian economy that is more dynamic, more resilient, more sustainable and most of all, more inclusive.

Street vendors play an important role in our economy. Accordingly, we will be offering a way for enterprising Bahamians to be able to sell their products on the streets of their respective islands, and to be able to do so in a safe and sustained manner.

The government will review the current licensing and regulatory procedures for street vendors. Our intention is to enable street vendors to be able to sell their products in safe and secure venues.

We want them to be able to do so in a way that does not pose undue dangers to themselves, pedestrians or the motoring public.

We will put in place the standards that ensure that they are able to meet health code requirements and thus not pose any health risk related to COVID-19 or otherwise. The vendors will be trained in these standards as a requirement of their license.

We will make available additional funding to the Small Business Development Center for business loans or grants for these street vendors that will allow them to adjust to the current circumstances and to support their business start-ups or expansion.

We must get our tourism sector up and running, as safely and as rapidly as possible.

Thus far, there is no other economic sector as prepared to deliver the range of employment and the depth of tax revenues with great immediacy, like tourism.

Our task now is to restore our confidence in ourselves by shutting down community spread and flattening the COVID-19 curve of transmissions and infections once again, over the next several weeks.

The only way that we can get there is by moving from “the government should” to “we should”.

We have to move from “they should” to “we should”. We have to move from “they say” to “we say”.

When the Bahamas is successful, it is not the government that is being successful. It is the Bahamian people who are achieving success!

Fellow Bahamians:

I again thank you for your patience, for your forbearance, for your fortitude and for the many expressions of good wishes for me and my government over the past several months and, most of all, for your prayers.

The demands and burdens placed on the shoulders of this young nation are unprecedented.

That is why we so appreciate your submission of thousands of strong and considered recommendations for improvements.

We will continue widespread consultation and dialogue with church leaders; with union leaders, including the medical unions; with the Chamber of Commerce and businesses; with civil society and with others.

Let me also thank my Cabinet colleagues, permanent secretaries, heads of agencies and public service officers for their hard work and dedication to country.

The preamble to our Constitution tells the world and reminds us that the People of this Family of Islands and this nation were born “recognizing that the preservation of their Freedom will be guaranteed by a national commitment to Self-discipline, Industry, Loyalty, Unity and an abiding respect for Christian values and the Rule of Law”.

Self-Discipline, Industry, Loyalty, Unity
and an abiding respect for Christian values
and the Rule of Law.

In our Constitution, the first letter of each
one of these virtues began with a capital
letter to emphasize the depth and power that
our national commitment to these elements
will bring to the advancement and success of
our Bahamas.

We are not perfect.

But in everything we do as a proud sovereign nation, we must lean forward and upward toward a better and more perfect nation.

When our history books are written in future, the year 2020 will loom large.

We wish to see it recorded that this gifted and beautiful blend of God-fearing people known as Bahamians looked to the pledges made in our Constitution and addressed this pandemic with the same national commitment to Self-discipline, Industry,

Loyalty, Unity and an abiding respect for Christian values and the Rule of Law”.

That is our common challenge and our shared promise.

Last week, eight-year-old Ethan Farquharson sent some encouraging words and a drawing to the Government, which I want to share with the entire country.

Thank you Ethan for your words of encouragement.

Thank you, to all of you who have offered your prayers, your frustrations your suggestions and most of all your advice.

We will get through this together!

May God bless us all and may God continue to bless the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.

Along with the health team, I am happy to answer your questions.