

CONGRATULATORY ADDRESS BY THE HON. PHILIP E. DAVIS, QC. MP
PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF FINANCE
ON THE ELECTION OF THE SPEAKER OF HONOURABLE HOUSE
6TH OCTOBER 2021

Madam Speaker,

It is a considerable honour to congratulate you on your election as Speaker of our Honourable House, which has been in continuous existence as the Assembly of the Bahamian people for some 292 years, one of the oldest Parliaments in the world.

I know that this is a moment replete with pride for you and your family. It is your achievement, but it is also an achievement for all Bahamians, as this Parliament has, for only the second time in our history, chosen a woman to preside over its proceedings.

You follow in the footsteps of Ms. Italia Johnson, another person of Cat Island descent, who in 1992 had the honour of being the first woman to be elected Speaker. As the representative for the people of Cat Island in this place, I warmly extend to you their congratulations. We are proud of your accomplishment and have no doubt that you will be balanced and judicious, and rule with equanimity from the seat of your authority.

Madam Speaker,

A few moments ago, thirty-nine members were sworn in as members of the House of Assembly. Of this group, twenty-four are new to our Honourable House. At a time of great crisis, we should greet this infusion of new thinking, new perspectives, and new energy with the warmest of welcomes.

It is indeed a very serious time to become a representative of the people, a time when our challenges are great, and the needs of the people are many.

I congratulate all of our fellow members and pray that each one of us works hard and well for our constituents and for all Bahamians.

We must all respect and honour the Rules, Customs and Practices that have guided the conduct of members of our House and ensure that democratic principles are fully entrenched in everything that we do.

And as Madam Speaker is well aware, the political impartiality of the Speaker is one of the most important features of our system.

Now that you have taken your solemn oath, each and every member of the House should feel confident that you will deal with them fairly and not show any form of favouritism or partiality. In like manner, we are all obliged to demonstrate courtesy and respect for you and for your office.

Madam Speaker,

I hope that my years of parliamentary experience will allow me, when helpful, to guide the newer members, and to offer to you, Madam Speaker, any wisdom gained from that experience - without overstepping my role or intruding on yours.

Madam Speaker,

On the 16th of September, the people of The Bahamas ushered in a New Day.

I would like to commend the Bahamian people for the peaceful, serious and measured manner in which they exercised their democratic rights.

The Bahamians who sent us to the House to represent them did so with votes that were not in many cases easy to cast. In fact, to our regret, many of our fellow citizens who wished to vote were not able to, for various reasons.

Nonetheless, the election last month did send a message: Bahamians said loud and clear that old answers are not the solutions we need to build a new future.

And there's no time to waste. The day of reckoning is here. Problems that were postponed too long must now be confronted.

Many of the choices which lie ahead will not be easy ones. But if we have the best interests and the dignity of the Bahamian people as our north star, we will rise to the moment.

Even as we move to stabilize the nation's finances, we need invest in new health care capacity, and to get our children back into classrooms that are safe for everyone.

We need to build an economy that is dynamic and exciting enough to answer the doubts of any young Bahamians who wonder if their futures can be built here.

We have a *moral* imperative to transform opportunities in education and employment and ownership.

We have to build for the future even as we confront the present.

In Parliament, the people rule through their Representatives, but there is a Higher Power, who would want us to act from a place of mercy, compassion, and humility.

Let us pray that we reach that worthy aspiration.

Madam Speaker,

It will be our sacred responsibility in the House of Assembly to not just find an exit from existing crises, but to build a country that is stronger and more resilient.

Let this be a time of renewal, a time when we come together with courage and with common purpose to define our nation's course, a time to serve our people, our country, and our God.

May God Bless You All, and May God Bless The Commonwealth of The Bahamas.