



REMARKS BY

THE HONOURABLE JEROME K. FITZGERALD

**MINISTER OF EDUCATION,
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

AT THE

**UNIVERSITY OF THE BAHAMAS
CHARTER DAY CEREMONY**

AT THE

THOMAS A. ROBINSON NATIONAL STADIUM

THURSDAY, 10TH NOVEMBER, 2016

10:30 A.M.

SALUTATIONS:

Her Excellency Dame Marguerite Pindling, Governor
General of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas;

The Right Honourable Perry Christie, Prime Minister
of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas;

Distinguished platform guests;

Special invited guests;

Ladies and gentlemen;

Students,

Good afternoon.

Today, I stand before you with a sense of humility and immense pride. I am grateful that in 2002 at the age of 36 I was invited to serve as Deputy Chairman of the College Council. That opportunity to serve my country has altered the course of my life.

Over the past few weeks, I have had many reasons to reflect. For me it has been a 14 year journey. I can still vividly recall that day in June 2002 when the Council met for the first time under the esteemed leadership of then Chairman Sir Franklyn Wilson and the then newly elected Prime Minister, The Right Honourable Perry Christie attended the meeting and gave the Council its mandate.

His mandate was short and simple, yet long term and complex; "Transition the College of The Bahamas to the University of The Bahamas!" he said.

There was a deafening silence as we pondered the magnitude of the directive.

Persons ask me from time to time why the Prime Minister chose me to be the Minister of Education. I respond by saying, he told me when he offered me the position that the transition of The College of The Bahamas to The University of The Bahamas was of paramount importance to him and the country, and he thought that I was best equipped to accomplish it.

God is Good!

This is indeed the day that the Lord has made! Prime Minister, I thank you for the confidence you've reposed in me and the support you continue to give me in the execution of my duties.

I have said on many occasions that there is no great city anywhere in the world that does not boast of a world class university. Today, the city of Nassau and by extension The Bahamas, is now a member of that class.

There can be no doubt that our country's future growth, success and sustainability will be inextricably linked to the University of The Bahamas. In fact I would go further and say our future is dependent on the University of The Bahamas.

The University will be the place where the brightest minds will congregate and test the elasticity of their imagination and the substance of their theories. Researchers will tackle complex challenges both locally, regionally and internationally. Young people will exchange ideas and cultures. Problems will be solved, dreams manifested and life-long friendships cultivated.

The University of The Bahamas is more than just a name. Indeed, It is the embodiment of who we are as a people and all we aspire to be. It is a beacon of hope that shines bright for the mother and father who never pursued tertiary education but pray and encourage their child to embrace the world of opportunities. It is the injection of motivation to our young people who dream of success and it will be a blanket of comfort as we compete and position ourselves in an ever changing world.

Today, I truly believe that our country is experiencing a paradigm shift that will enhance our economy, expand our intellect and sustain us as a people for generations to come.

Having had the benefit of a world class education I have always been cognizant of the inequality that exist for those who are unable to afford tertiary level

education. That has been the main driving force behind me encouraging the Prime Minister and my colleagues to more than double scholarship funding over the past 4 years. I am proud to say that scholarship funding has increased over the past 4 years from 7.75M to 16.2M.

There can be no doubt that education is the great equalizer and it should be blind to the condition or background of the deserving student. That is why I am thrilled to see students here today in the thousands.

Students can you hear me?

This is your moment in time!

This is your University!

I want all of you to leave here today with this assurance; it matters not which school you attend, it is of no consequence which community you live; your parents educational background or place of work is of no relevance - as long as you believe in yourself and your God given talents, and you are prepared to work hard and dream of success, there is a space reserved for you at your University of The Bahamas.

It was almost 40 years ago at the official opening of the College of The Bahamas on January 14th 1977. Let me repeat that, it was almost 40 years ago for those of you who understand the significance of what I'm saying, when the Father of our Nation the late Sir Lynden Pindling began his remarks with these words:

“Once upon a time the common assumption was that The Bahamas would never amount to much and that

there will never be the need for Bahamians with higher levels of education and training.”

Today, I call on ALL Bahamians to assess your value system and commit to making education not just a priority but a core Bahamian value.

Our country was built by great men and women who came from nothing and who had little or no resources. Today we have much more and to whom much is given much is expected!

Whether we accept it or not, the future growth of each individual, the success of each family, the development of each community, and invariably the sustainability of our entire country, begins and ends with education!

Our individual and collective greatness as a people depends on our ability to educate our citizens and to instill in our children from preschool to graduate school the value of education.

What I personally desire more than anything is for all of our students to aspire to some form of tertiary education. To recognize that graduation from high school is not the end, but rather the beginning. To appreciate that tertiary education is more than attending lectures and learning about a specified major, but that a university education is springboard to a life time of opportunities.

Today is a new beginning. The University of The Bahamas will continue to evolve, appreciating that the only constant is change! It must position itself as a top university not just locally and regionally but globally. It must be recognized as a center for research while

never losing focus of the national advancement and enlightenment of its people.

I firmly believe that there is still much to be accomplished for this great nation. I also believe that the national goals waiting to be achieved will be undeniably linked to the University of The Bahamas in the same manner that the fulfilment of the post-independence goals were undeniably linked to the establishment of the College of The Bahamas.

As I close, I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to ALL the individuals involved in making this dream a reality. To the noble faculty of this institution, our country will forever be indebted to you for your contribution in shaping some of the brightest minds of our nation.

Many of my Cabinet, and Parliamentary colleagues were educated at the College and attribute much of their professional success to the quality of education they received here. If the past success of the College of The Bahamas is any indication of what the future holds for the University of The Bahamas, I have every confidence the university will continue to grow from strength to strength.

To President Smith, may you always lead with passion, purpose and wisdom. May your moral compass guide and direct you so that all that is done and accomplished at the University of The Bahamas will be done to the honour and glory of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is now my esteemed pleasure to introduce to you, the leader of our great

nation; a man who dares to dream big, a man who has a heart for education and the acute appreciation of its power to transform lives, a man who possessed the political will and fortitude to make this day a reality.

Please stand as I welcome, the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas, the Right Honourable Perry Gladstone Christie to deliver the keynote address.

Thank you!