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BPSU President Supports New Budget

By Darrin Culmer

President of the Bahamas Public Services Union [BPSU] John Pinder expressed strong support over the weekend for the 2008/2009 budget, which is being debated in the House of Assembly.

In addition to the budget's provisions aimed at jump starting the economy, the reduction or elimination of import duties on a number of food items is especially helpful, Mr. Pinder said in an interview with the Bahama Journal.

"We believe that it's very important for the working population and Bahamians in general to be able to afford to eat properly. I think the (budget) should bring a little relief and cause them to be able to buy better foods and strengthen their diet," Mr. Pinder said.

He also called on the government to make provision for adequate price control inspectors and to see to it that inspectors have sufficient authority to ensure that the benefits of the tariff reductions are passed on to consumers.

Approving another recently announced disclosure of Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham, Mr. Pinder said he is "very excited" that the government would even think about -purchasing the Grand Bahama Port Authority.

When he led off debate on the government's 2008/2009 budget last Wednesday, Prime Minister Ingraham said the government cannot wait for an indefinite period for the principals of the Port Authority to resolve their ownership feud.

He further indicated that the government is willing to purchase the company.

"That's an excellent idea," Mr. Pinder said.

"I really believe that would take a lot of burdens off Bahamians in Grand Bahama."

Mr. Pinder also brought several of the union's concerns to the fore during his interview.

One of the BPSU's concerns, he said, is the failure of some officials to recognize the union as the bargaining agent of some 400 employees in the Ministry of Tourism.

"The biggest disappointment that the BPSU has is that the Ministry of Tourism is actually challenging us on recognition," he said.

Mr. Pinder added, "We are disappointed that we are still not able to have regular consultation with the Cabinet ministers in relation to the unions that they respectively have control over so that we can be in a position to address those issues before they escalate to any industrial dispute."

He also said the union is concerned that the government is about to privatize BTC and the workers' representative doesn't have a voice in what is happening.