

BUT president to address school security

The Bahamas Union of Teachers' newly-elected president said she plans to address many issues facing the educational system this year, including school security, human resources matters and the development of a national education plan.

Belinda Wilson, whose term will not end until 2011, said she will put the issue regarding police in schools to rest once and for all.

The pilot program which placed police officers at six junior high schools and six senior high schools on New Providence; one senior high school in Abaco and three senior high schools in Grand Bahama, was stopped last year when the Free National Movement came into power. The program was put in place by the former Progressive Liberal Party government to address the rising levels of violence in some of the government schools.

Instead, officers patrol the areas surrounding schools during peak hours from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. and again from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Wilson, the union's former secretary general, said the union will look closely at the issue of health and safety in the workplace, with particular emphasis on school violence.

"I am sending out questionnaires to members in terms of policing in the schools as soon as school starts in September. As early as 2002, teachers wanted police in schools. Right now there are mixed feelings on whether police should be in schools or out of schools, so we will make that determination in September," she said.

Former president Ida Poitier-Turnquest said the BUT did not believe that police should be placed on school campuses.

Meantime, Wilson said while she believes that the educational system has made great strides, she believes that a concerted effort needs to be placed on the development of a national educational plan, to span for at least half a century.

"Every time the government changes, education changes in the country...the curriculum changes. If the new minister comes in and figures that he or she doesn't like something, it will be changed. What we need is a national education plan that expands for at least 50 years," said Wilson.

The president-elect added: "The plan might have to be modified based on the changes in technology or strategy, and we might have to tweak it as we go, but there will be one basic guideline."

Wilson said her team is also working on transfers and reassignments for teachers across The Bahamas. She added that several teachers are waiting on salaries and rent money that are owed to them.

These issues, she said, could be addressed as early as next week.

Wilson announced that the government is currently working on a Teaching Service Commission initiative, which she said will help to diminish and eradicate a significant

number of human resources problems that they have, including outstanding paychecks for teachers and school staff.

It will also allow the ministry to hire teachers more quickly, a much-needed initiative, she added.

Finally, Wilson said she was working on the draft of an anti-violence discipline plan to encompass policing and law enforcement, job placement and community service.

She said that once that is finished, she will present it to her team so that the draft can be tailored to suit the needs of the Bahamian youth. From there, BUT will present it to the government.

The following persons were elected to represent the BUT for the three-year period (2008-2011) following the highly-contested elections last week: President, Belinda Wilson; Vice President, Father Sebastian Campbell; Secretary General, Stephen McPhee; Assistant Secretary General, Jeleah Turnquest; Treasurer, Janice Armbrister; Assistant Treasurer, Andrea Lockhart; Area Vice President for New Providence, Bridgette Seymour; Area Vice President for Grand Bahama, Quinton Laroda; Area Vice President for Southern Bahamas, Anasaye Knowles; Area Vice President for Northern Bahamas, Yolanda Curry; executive members Marilyn Burrows, Philip Sturup and Wayne Thompson. The Trustees are Margaret Albury and Judymae Johnson.