

Foot in mouth

DPM adds to his mountain of ill-considered thoughts



Philip Brave Davis.

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There is no end to the eyebrow-raising, confusing comments we often get from our deputy prime minister, Philip Brave Davis.

The list is long.

Davis previously called into question the integrity of the fine professionals of the Department of Statistics when he said he had doubts over the figures that showed unemployment had risen, though he admitted he had not seen the department's report.

Last week, he missed an opportunity to give a reasonable response to the auditor general's report on the Urban Renewal Programme.

As opposed to pledging the government's commitment to correcting weaknesses, he sided with Urban Renewal Co-Chairs Cynthia "Mother" Pratt and Algernon Allen in their attack on the auditor general.

In the face of damning findings from the auditor general, he insisted the program is transparent.

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Last July, after The Nassau Guardian revealed that Prime Minister Perry Christie had asked Renward Wells to resign as parliamentary secretary in the Ministry of Works, Davis told the media that he still needed to determine if Wells did anything wrong when he signed a letter of intent for a waste-to-energy project.

Davis' recent conflicting statements over an insurance controversy involving the Bahamas Agriculture and Marine Science Institute (BAMSI), and his failure to report fully on all the BAMSI contracts spoke poorly of his leadership of the Ministry of Works.

Latest blunder

His latest blunder was revealed when he was asked to respond to the AmericasBarometer survey conducted by Vanderbilt University.

As we reported last week, the survey was a part of the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP).

The survey was financed by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

While Davis admitted that he had not seen the results of the survey, he said the government has reached out to the IDB to get an "understanding" of the survey.

We are not sure what the point of that would be.

Firstly, the IDB did not conduct the survey. But the DPM suggested the IDB has some explaining to do.

Davis said, "I am not certain the aim of the report as described by Candia [Dames] is the kind of conduct that you would expect from an international agency.

"And so, I know that efforts have been and contact has been made with the IDB to get an understanding of what has been put out there in the public domain."

We would imagine that IDB officials would be laughing silently at this statement.

Quite frankly, we were ourselves embarrassed by the deputy prime minister's comments.

If the government wants to understand the purpose of the AmericasBarometer survey and the highly-credible LAPOP, there is more than enough information provided by Vanderbilt with just a click of the mouse.

Why would the IDB need to explain its "conduct" over a scientific survey it financed?

On its website, the Latin American Public Opinion Project explains: "LAPOP is the premier academic institution carrying out surveys of public opinion in the Americas, with over 30 years of experience".

As a center for excellence in survey research, LAPOP uses "gold standard" approaches and innovative methods to carry out targeted national surveys; conduct impact evaluation studies, and produce reports on individual attitudes, evaluations and experiences.

The AmericasBarometer survey is the only scientifically rigorous comparative survey that covers 28 nations including all of North, Central, and South America, as well as a significant number of countries in the Caribbean. Each year it publishes dozens of high quality academic studies and policy-relevant papers.

According to the technical information that accompanies the results, the 2014 survey was conducted by Vanderbilt University with field work being carried out by Public Domain, a local market research and public opinion firm.

The project used a national probability sample design of voting-age adults, with a total of 3,429 people involved in face-to-face interviews.

The sample size is considered more than respectable for our population size.

Davis accused National Review of "misrepresenting" the results of the survey — again, results he admits he has never seen.

"The headlines and the content of the story and some of the content appears to be inherently conflicting to me," he said.

"And on the face of it, it appears to me that is a clear misinterpretation of those figures."

When asked to provide specific conflicts in the article to validate his point, he refused.

He said the story published in National Review was "vague", and he too shall remain vague.

Davis said he was awaiting the completion of discussions with the IDB.

Results

As we reported last week, the survey results reveal attitudes toward a wide variety of topics, from politics to the state of the economy to crime and many other areas in between.

Last Monday, we focused largely on the results to the political questions. We also included responses related to questions on the economy and crime.

For much of the week, we reported on the results, including respondents' attitudes toward the police, openly gay people running for office and same-sex marriages.

We noted in our National Review article on April 13 that more than 45 percent of the Bahamians surveyed said they would vote for a candidate or party different from the current administration if an election were held this week.

Another 24.5 percent said they would not vote at all.

And 27.2 percent said they would vote for an incumbent candidate or party.

We concluded that this is a clear indication that the governing party is losing steam.

We also reported the results to a question on Prime Minister Perry Christie's job performance.

The results showed that 9.5 percent viewed the prime minister's job performance as "very good" and 37.4 percent as "good".

The results showed that 9.6 percent viewed Christie's job performance as "very bad".

Another 11.3 percent viewed it as "bad".

Thirty-two point two percent said Christie's job performance was neither good nor bad, but "fair".

We pointed out that Christie could at least find comfort in these results, which show that 46.9 percent either think he is doing a good or a very good job.

We also noted that it should be extremely worrying that such a high percentage of people said they would reject the Progressive Liberal Party in an election.

Had we wanted to misrepresent the results, we could easily have chosen not to print the job performance results.

Last Monday, Progressive Liberal Party Chairman Bradley Roberts said the survey results were good news for Christie and bad news for Opposition Leader Dr. Hubert Minnis.

We carried Roberts' response in a front page article the following day.

He claimed the "constant negative messaging from the usual suspects" is not having the kind of negative impact that these purveyors of gloom and doom hoped for.

Following all of this, Davis came along once again without reviewing the results. He ended up adding to the mountain of ill-considered thoughts he has placed in the public domain over the years.