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W E E K D A Y E D I T I O N

Traffic Fatalities Have Economic Impact

By HADASSAH HALL

Given the fact that driver behavior throughout the country has contributed to nearly 200 traffic fatalities over the past three years, The Bahamas Society of Engineers is calling on the government to vigorously enforce road traffic laws.

"Both visitors and residents are meeting their demise on our roadways at an unacceptable rate," President Cyprian Gibson said. "This translates [into] a substantial financial burden on the coun-

try, taking into account impacts such as lost wages, medical insurance expenses and negative international media exposure."

The Society is lobbying for this move just days after Holy Cross Member of Parliament Sidney Stubbs revealed in the House of Assembly that a travel advisory was issued informing visitors from countries such as the United States, Britain and Canada that the leading cause of death among travelers to the Bahamas are traffic crashes.

Mr. Stubbs was making his

contribution to a request by St. Margaret M.P. Pierre Dupuch for a House of Assembly select committee into the high rate of accidents and fatalities throughout the country. That committee was approved and appointed.

Mr. Dupuch chairs the committee. Other members include Carmichael M.P. John Carey; Lucaya M.P. Neko Grant; Holy Cross M.P. Sidney Stubbs; and Pineridge M.P. Ann Percentie.

Mr. Gibson added that local research would confirm that numerous fatalities are the result of driving under the influence of alcohol.

"A systematic and targeted intervention against those drunk drivers must be given due consideration and implemented," Mr. Gibson said.

Meanwhile, Ray McKenzie, a

principal of Caribbean Civil Group and a member of the Society, feels that enforcement must begin for small infractions, so as to demonstrate the government's intent on cracking down on unruly motorists.

"Cutting through gas stations, running red lights, blocking driveways, parking on sidewalks, all of those things are against the law and should be enforced vigorously and I think if drivers know that if they will receive a ticket for parking on the sidewalk for instance, they will be very weary to go ahead and do that," Mr. McKenzie told The Bahama Journal.

"I think the enforcement aspect will go a long way in terms of helping to reshape the culture, in terms of how we drive and what we try to get away with on our

roadways," he added.

Mr. McKenzie views the success in modifying driver behavior and institutionalizing a culture of safe driving habits, as a task that requires a systematic approach. This includes comprehensive legislation, rigid enforcement and a zero tolerance policy as it relates to any traffic infraction, he said.

"You would find that drivers would push the envelope...we try to get away with as much as the law would let us get away with. We always hear about when Bahamians go to Miami, they obey the rules of the roadway because they understand that if they push the envelope, they will get ticketed. And so we need to bring the same type of mindset here and the only way we can do that is if we enforce the law and have a zero tolerance."

In the interim, Mr. Gibson doesn't see the challenge of reducing the fatalities and crashes on the country's roadways as insurmountable.

However, he recognizes that it has to be approached with a clear appreciation of the contributing factors that affect traffic crashes including drivers, the vehicle, road and conditions of the environment.

"Any approach to address the situation must be lead by government and should be holistic in nature," Mr. Gibson said.

This would include, but not be limited to, the vehicle inspection process, which must encompass inspection techniques that address the mechanical characteristics of each vehicle such as brakes and tires, he said.