



GOVERNMENT OF JAMAICA

BUILDING A CARING ECONOMY FOR YOU

March
21

TIME: 2PM 2024

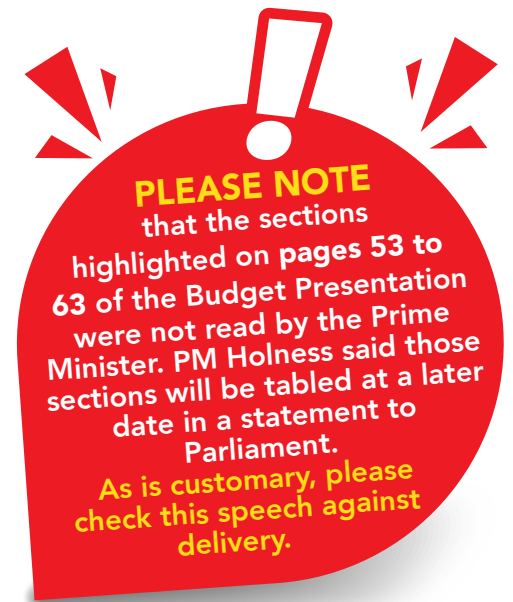
 GORDONHOUSE

BUDGET
DEBATE 20
24





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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Senators and Former Members seated in the well,

Excellencies of the Diplomatic Corps,

Jamaicans here and in the diaspora, listening, watching and following on various media platforms,

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen in the gallery,

I thank the Almighty God for sparing us to see another day, we rejoice and are glad in it, we give thanks for His countless blessings in our lives individually and in Jamaica. I want to thank my family for their love and support, particularly Juliet and my Mom who is here in this Honourable House today. I want to thank my colleagues in Cabinet, our Parliamentary caucus, Party members, and the people of West Central St. Andrew for their steadfast and loyal support. I want to thank my personal staff and advisors for their tireless work. I want to thank the hardworking public sector workers, and board members who make the achievements I will report today possible and will make the plans I will highlight a reality.

I also want to acknowledge all the people who follow and engage with me on social media. I read your messages and appreciate your support and feedback, whether it is about the work to be done, your suggestions, or words of encouragement on our governance of the country. Keep them coming. I appreciate them all.

INTRODUCTION

Madam Speaker, there is no challenge that faces Jamaica, that God has not endowed us with the strength and wisdom to overcome.

Just look at what we as a country have achieved:

We have had **10 consecutive quarters of economic growth since the pandemic**. Prior to the pandemic, we had 20 consecutive quarters of economic growth. This is the longest unbroken period of economic expansion since Independence.

More Jamaicans have work today than any other time since independence. **Unemployment is at a record low of 4.2%. Since 2016, over 156,000 new jobs have been created.**



Our **national debt as a percentage of GDP is at the lowest level in 30 years**, just over a decade ago, it was at the highest level in our history. All three major ratings agencies – **S&P, Moody's and Fitch** - have upgraded their ratings to the highest levels in our history.

Two weeks ago Fitch stated that *"Robust fiscal management has contributed to a turnaround in creditworthiness following the 2013 distressed debt exchange that Fitch considered a default."* Fitch went on to say that this *"represents the third largest decline in debt burden among all rated sovereigns over this period - only Ireland and Iceland experienced a larger decline."* There is no developing country that has achieved our rate of debt burden reduction over the last decade. Jamaica is viewed as a shining star in this regard.

Madam Speaker, there is an additional statistic, not spoken about as much but fills me with the most optimism for the future.

For the last fiscal year 2022/23, **Jamaica recorded a Balance of Payments Surplus on our Current Account of US\$352.4m. The last time Jamaica had a Current Account Surplus was in 1966!** What this means is that, for the first time since 1966, our exports plus net remittances exceed our imports. This is a good sign that we are heading in a sustainable direction of increasing exports relative to our imports. For the period January – October 2023, STATIN reported a 16.9% increase compared to 2022.

We have created a **stable and robust macroeconomic environment of fiscal certainty** which supports employment and income generation, capital investment, and increased economic activity. This has allowed my Administration, the Andrew Holness Administration, to present **nine (9) consecutive budgets with no net new taxes**. More than that, my administration has actively reduced the tax burden on the people of the country:

- In the 2016/2017 budget, we announced an increase in the income tax threshold in two phases - from \$592,800 to \$1,000,272 effective July 1, 2016, and from \$1,000,272 to \$1,500,096 effective April 1, 2017.
- In the 2019/2020 budget, we increased the Turnover Threshold required for registration to pay General Consumption Tax (GCT) from JA\$3 million to JA\$10 million.
- We reduced the rate of Transfer Tax on property from 5% to 2% and replaced ad valorem Stamp Duty with a flat rate of JA\$5,000 per document.
- We increased the minimum estate value on which transfer tax is levied on a deceased person's estate from JA\$100,000 to JA\$10 million.
- We abolished the Asset Tax payable by non-financial institutions.
- We abolished the Minimum Business Tax of \$60,000.00 per annum.
- In the 2020/2021 budget, we reduced GCT from 16.5% to 15%.
- We reduced the rate of Asset Tax on financial institutions from 0.25% to 0.125% of taxable assets.
- In the 2021/2022 budget, we removed the Customs Administration Fee (CAF) on export declarations with an export value less than US\$500.



- And in this budget, we have increased the income tax threshold from \$1.5 million to \$1.7 million and increased the Pension Relief and Age Relief from \$80,000 each to \$250,000. We also increased the de minimis value for imported goods for customs purposes from US\$50 to US\$100 and the duty-free allowance for inbound passengers from US\$500 to US\$1,000.

For a long time in this country, the population approached the Budget season with dread and trepidation wondering what additional taxes the government is going to impose on them.

www.jamaica-gleaner.com VOLUME 75 NO. 16 SUNDAY, APRIL 20, 2014 KINGSTON, JAMAICA 132 PAGES

Bank tax BACKLASH!

THE GOVERNMENT is coming under increasing fire over the announced new tax to be imposed on withdrawals from deposit-taking institutions, starting June 1.

Finance Minister Dr Peter Phillips announced the new tax as he opened the Budget Debate last Thursday, and said the measure was expected to gain \$2.25 billion this fiscal year, which would provide the bulk of the \$6.7 billion in new taxes which the Government is budgeting to collect.

The tax will be calculated on a graduated rate system, with withdrawals less than \$1 million being subject to a 0.1 per cent tax. This means that Jamaicans will pay \$1 for every \$1,000 they withdraw from deposit-taking institutions through electronic banking, point of sale transactions (debit cards).

Erica Virtue
2013 PAJ award winner

PLEASE SEE BACKLASH, A3



www.jamaica-gleaner.com VOLUME 151 NO. 62 FRIDAY, MARCH 13, 2015 KINGSTON, JAMAICA 68 PAGES INCLUDING GST \$60

NEW GAS TAX

Phillips says Gov't will hedge oil prices with new levy on petrol

Norman Grindley
CHIEF PHOTOGRAPHER
Dr Peter Phillips during his Budget presentation in Parliament yesterday.

Daraine Lutton
Senior Staff Reporter

THE JAMAICAN Government has taken the decision to hedge against an increase in the price of petroleum on the world market and is to impose a \$7 per litre tax on petrol to pay for the mechanism, which finance minister Dr Peter Phillips has likened to an insurance policy.

While government officials were yesterday unwilling to disclose the volume of petrol and the price at which the hedging will take place, Phillips, in opening the Budget

the new tax will yield \$6.4 billion. The measure takes effect on Wednesday.

Brian Pengelley, president of the Jamaica Manufacturing Association (JMA) welcomed the announcement saying the build-up of a hedge fund shows good planning.

"It is hard but it is good financial planning. In our sector we have to plan long term because we don't know what prices are going to do, so we do long-term planning and part of that is certainly building in hedge," Pengelley told *The Gleaner* yesterday.

"Financial planning in business is something that we have to do and that helps us with stability



Madam Speaker, we have completely changed that. Now when we are approaching a budget, the question that is being asked is, "What 'goodies' the government is going to announce?" That is a profound change. Workers, families, small business, investors – can plan their affairs and think long term without worrying that the government will impose some tax to mash up their plans. Government is no longer a burden to the people!

It is a puzzle to the Opposition, how a government can eliminate some taxes completely, relieve significant numbers of persons from paying taxes, reduce the tax rate itself, and still increase the tax revenue collected.

They have now resorted to spreading an outright lie that the government has increased taxes in order to explain what they don't understand, or are too ashamed to admit their government has never been able to do this. They cannot admit that more Jamaicans are employed now than at any other time, so more Jamaicans have income and purchasing power. The new hotels that have been built, the new BPOs and construction projects, the small businesses and medium enterprises all contribute their fair share to the tax revenue.

Moreover, wage levels have increased, and more persons are seeing the benefit of joining the formal economy, by becoming compliant and contributing to the tax pool. The government in turn takes these tax revenues and returns it to the citizens in ways that increase quality of life. We have increased public sector wages, we have increased expenditure on National Security, Health, Education, Water, Pensions and Social Security. Moreover, we have used your taxes to bring down debt servicing, which creates more room to spend on the things that matter to you.

I can understand why the Opposition would continue to lie about taxes, they have never been in this position and quite frankly they don't know how to get to this position of financing a budget mainly from tax revenues without increasing taxes.

The debate has now moved to how the dividend of the good stewardship of the economy should be spent. There have been many decades of neglect and disinvestment in our people and our infrastructure which makes the competition for expenditure attention and benefits intense and agitated, especially when it coincides with the political cycle. Everything is a priority now! In such an environment of expectation and frustration, it is easy for the Opposition to make wild promises without considering costs, to want to spend the dividend of skillful stewardship of the economy that they did not create, to play up on emotions and abandon reasonableness and fiscal prudence.

The pressures to "run wild it" are not limited to opposition parties.

Internally, governments face these pressures even more as they face, sometimes angry constituents, who at the point of their frustration with bad roads, lack of water, or garbage piling up, don't want to hear about maintaining fiscal discipline, reducing debt to GDP, complying with procurement rules, or improved ratings from Fitch. They put pressure on MPs...



no road, no vote. The pressures that existed in 2002 when the Minister of Finance at the time made his now infamous statement of, “run wid it”, are the same pressures that exist today. What should be clear to constituents and electors is that “run wid it” did not solve the fundamental problem of a weak economy and slow government bureaucracy then. If anything it worsened the problem.

22 years later, what is different? Today, you have a responsible government who have been good stewards of your affairs. Today, you have a Government who is not only interested in power but is truly interested in people.

You have a government who will face the electorate with the truth about our difficult circumstances because we respect your ability to understand, unlike the “samfie” opposition who tries to twist narratives because they belittle your understanding. Today, you have a government who creates wealth and wellbeing for all, balances lives and livelihoods, wages and work. What is different today, is that we have a government that will resist the temptation for reckless policy decisions.

We have a Government that creates the cash that it uses to care.

We have a Government that truly puts people first!

Madam Speaker, the campaign for the recent local government elections was an opportunity for constituents and electors across the length and breadth of the country to express their frustrations, agitation and grievances.

There were two clear and consistent messages from the people.

The first message was that while most constituents appreciated, to varying extent, the importance of macroeconomic growth and stability, they want to see that macroeconomic success translated into meaningful benefits at the microeconomic level – in their households and communities. They are happy to see the highways being built but they also want the road to their community fixed.

I hear you loud and clear, Papanana and other faithful callers to daily talk shows. We are a “listening government”. **We are a learning government, but above all, we are a caring and responsive government.** We will continue on the path of fiscal responsibility to build a strong and vibrant economy that generates surpluses and we will use these surpluses to care for the people's needs. The Jamaica Labour Party that I lead does not subscribe to trickle down economics. At the 2012 Annual Conference of the Jamaica Labour Party, I outlined our policy thinking to the Jamaican people. I said then, that the Jamaica Labour Party does not believe in “trickle down” theory, we do not believe that, because there is economic growth, people are automatically going to benefit.



I declared that as a political organisation we believe in social activism, we put in place policies to ensure that while the economy is growing, the people are benefiting. There are those who talk about putting people first, we are the government that has actually put people first.

- That is why we introduced tuition-free education, and as a result we are now close to universal secondary education.
- That is why we introduced free access to healthcare that improved the health seeking behaviour of Jamaicans.
- That is why we made technical and vocational training free at the HEART/NSTA Trust, where over 120,000 young people have registered since the removal of fees.
- That is why we have consistently increased the various tax thresholds to free more Jamaicans from taxation (Custom Duty Thresholds, GCT Threshold, Pension Thresholds, Estate/inheritance Threshold, and PAYE income tax Threshold).
- That is why we introduced a social pension for seniors over 75 who were not NIS contributors.
- That is why we are introducing unemployment insurance
- That is why we have removed the guarantor from student loans
- That is why we give a subsidy on bus fares to cushion the impact of inflation on the commuting public.

We use economic gains to implement people-centred policies that care for and protect the most vulnerable among us and ensure that the gains are shared equitably to improve the lives of all Jamaicans.

We are deliberate in what we do to help the poor, we are the government that cares for the poor and working class, not just in talk but with action.

Madam Speaker, the second message from the people was that, while they see progress, they have been waiting for a long time and want to know when it is going to be their turn. We all know that the pain-points which frustrate us; poor garbage collection, bad roads, lack of water, existed decades before this Administration. They know that my administration is building the economy that provides the resources to address the pain-points systematically and simultaneously.

Because of our skillful management of COVID-19, some may have forgotten that our plans and programmes were severely derailed, and the government was forced to redirect its efforts and over \$70 billion for pandemic response, including \$40 billion on the CARE programme. There can be no greater testament to how far Jamaica has come than that we have withstood the worst global health and economic shock in 100 years and recovered stronger than we were before, to the point that today, the pandemic is like a distant memory for most Jamaicans. **This administration has been the most resilient in Jamaica's history.**



Nevertheless, we understand that the people want their government to accelerate the speed of project implementation and the effectiveness of programme delivery. In other words the people want their government to increase its productivity. I have long recognized this and I started the year with a mantra that **Jamaica must focus on the twin path of building peace and increasing productivity to create a virtuous cycle of prosperity.**

Madam Speaker, despite the setback of COVID, the ensuing economic fallout and its lingering inflation, Jamaica is back on track. **We are now entering a period of the largest and most sustained public investment in the history of Jamaica.** The projected central government capital expenditure in the next five years is over J\$500 billion. A number of projects will be implemented through public private partnerships so the overall investment will be over \$1 trillion on Highways, Local Roads (including community and farm roads), Bridges, Public Parks, Hospitals, Schools, Markets, Rural and Utility Water Supply, Sewerage, Irrigation, Houses, Police Stations, Fire stations, Tax Offices, Court Houses, Buses, Garbage Trucks, Entertainment Zones, Stadium and other Sporting Facilities, Digital Infrastructure, and IT systems. Projects that others dreamt of, announced, and talked about for years, the Andrew Holness Administration will convert those dream projects into reality. And I will outline some of these plans and projects this afternoon.

Madam Speaker, over the past few years, the pace of project implementation has been such that we have struggled to spend the Capital Budget.

We will not be able to implement these infrastructure projects at the pace required unless we increase public sector efficiency and productivity. Based on our long term strategic planning of the economy, we saw on the horizon that low productivity, among other concerns such as shortage of skilled labour, would be a constraining factor for growth. With our existing level of productivity our growth path is confined to 1% to 2% on average. If we were to secure a level of productivity to the point where we are able to spend the full Capital Budget and implement the projects as scheduled, we could move our growth pathway to 3% to 4% conservatively over the next 5 years. This would mean a doubling of the rate of project delivery, which means getting better roads, water, hospitals, buses, garbage collection to you at double the current rate.

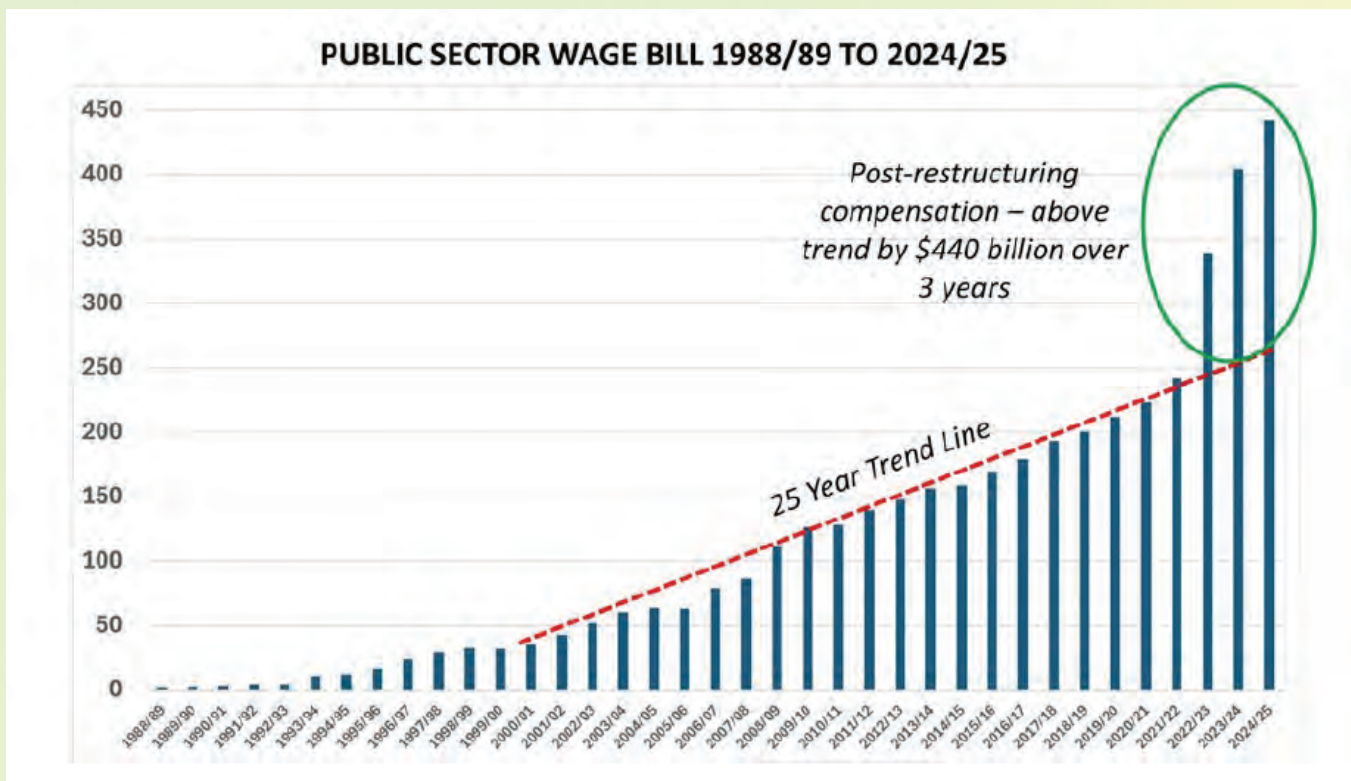
We knew that if we are to effectively deal with the productivity issue we must address wages. Everyone knows that Jamaica has long been trapped into a vicious cycle of low wage, yielding low output, leading to a low growth economy which can only sustain low wages.

The constant struggle of public sector workers is to bring their wages into reasonable alignment with market compensation and keep apace with inflation. In the mid-90's there was an agreement to move public sector salaries to 80% of market. In early 2000s the government of the day implemented 2 tranches of salary increases for the Central Government workers and Parliamentarians, but then had to suspend further increases, and in fact implemented a wage freeze shortly thereafter in 2004. In 2008 the Golding Administration brought teachers up to



80% of market, and gave increases to some other sectors of workers, by 2010 a wage freeze was put in effect, and by 2013 another wage freeze was enforced. None of the attempts at aligning public sector wages to market treated the entire public sector in one programme, and none of them were sustainable. In fact, the history of compensation adjustments is that, rounds of adjustments were followed by rounds of high inflation, financial crises and the implementation of wage freezes which made public sector salaries uncompetitive.

We understand that to build a partnership for increased productivity with public sector workers, our government must make significant allocation to reasonably align their wages to market without creating a fiscal crisis. For decades, this was something that every administration would have liked to have done, but never really had the courage, wherewithal, or economic conditions to do. This administration has finally done it and in a comprehensive way. That is not to say that everything is now perfect. When you take on such a massive exercise, there will be issues and anomalies that arise affecting certain individuals or groups. I understand the frustration that can be generated when sometimes there is miscommunication, misunderstandings or slow responses between the Ministry of Finance and the various bargaining groups. This should not, however, take away from this major accomplishment. The workers and the country should know that work to complete the adjustments, and implement the other elements of compensation review continues, and the Government is committed to resolving all anomalies.



Madam Speaker, I want the country to understand the magnitude of the investment of this Government in our public service. The graph now being displayed on the screen shows the total public sector wage bill from 1988/89 to 2024/25 (budgeted).

Madam Speaker, the graph shows that the wage bill over 22 years from 1999/2000 to 2021/22 basically followed a trend line – which is the red dotted line. If we now compare the actual amounts paid for 2022/23, 2023/24 and the budgeted amount for 2024/25, we see that they are significantly higher than the trend line.

The compensation review exercise was carried out over three years – 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25, so the full impact of the restructuring is reflected in the budget for 2024/25. The total wage bill for 2021/22 which was before the restructuring exercise was \$241.75 billion. The total wage bill budgeted for 2024/25 is \$442.05 billion. That is a significant increase of \$200 billion or 83% in favour of the public sector workers. The effect of this is not only the immediate change in remuneration, the restructured salaries create a larger base for pensions for public sector workers on retirement.

Having increased the levels of salaries, we must now protect this new level from high inflation. While our inflation targeting policy is working, the greatest protection against inflation is increased productivity which translates into greater output, greater growth and greater revenues, which can sustain higher wages which lead to greater productivity! **Every worker, on a personal level, should embrace the virtuous cycle of productivity and see increasing productivity as being in their own best interest to protect the value of their current income and secure future increases.**

I know whenever the issue of productivity is raised there is a tendency to want to blame or highlight shortcomings of our workers. While there are issues, I know that when the Jamaican worker is motivated and the industrial relations atmosphere is copacetic, you will not find more industrious and committed workers than our Jamaican people. Labour, however, is only one factor in the productivity equation. While we want workers to be independently responsible for their productivity, management has an indispensable role to play in structuring the work environment to enable workers to give of their best. This is why performance management is such an important part of the compensation restructuring exercise. We must restructure work, reengineer processes, and introduce systems and technology to empower the worker to innovate, work smarter, measure their output, and reward their effort. We want to build a new public sector bureaucracy that can adequately serve the new Jamaica that is emerging. One in which the public sector worker can feel that the compensable elements of their job reasonably and dynamically approximate market alignment, and that the value of their compensation will keep pace with inflation.

In addition, we want to encourage a new dominant mindset where the public sector worker embraces performance and productivity management systems and sees their effort as not only the basis for reward but their contribution to building a growing, prosperous and fair economy.



I want every public sector worker to feel that doing their job faster and better will increase growth and they will share in that growth.

Madam Speaker, Jamaica is rapidly building out our rules and institutions. This has created a complex web of laws, regulations, policies, circulars and guidelines which can slow down, if not paralyse, the government. There have been numerous calls from MPs on both sides, from the private sector, from Boards and management of MDAs to reform the system and processes. The Minister of Finance and the Public Service outlined some changes to the Procurement Process. Streamlining of the existing Public Investment Appraisal Process to increase speed and efficiency while preserving accountability and probity will also be necessary.

The tortuous and lengthy process to repair the Troy bridge makes the case for the urgent need for review and reform.

The bridge collapsed in August 2021 during the passage of Tropical Storm Grace. The bridge, which was built in 1869, served residents of Trelawny, Manchester, and St Elizabeth, including students of the nearby Troy High and Troy Primary School. The bridge represents critical infrastructure for the residents and there is unanimity that the bridge must be replaced. Under the current Public Investment Management Guidelines, however, the project is required to go through the full Public Investment Appraisal process. This is even before we get to procurement. This has resulted in significant delays in implementation; however, today I can finally announce that a contract has been awarded and work will begin early in the first quarter of the coming financial year.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Madam Speaker, this administration is pursuing productivity gains through the digital transformation of government services. The National Identification System Project, has been very integral to building out the underlying Public Key Infrastructure to support secure online services.

The NIDS project has supported the roll out of e-passports and the electronic immigration gates (e-gates) which are now fully operational at Sangster International Airport and has assisted greatly in speeding up passenger flow. E-gates are now being tested in the Norman Manley International Airport.

The regulations pursuant to the National Identification and Registration Act are ready and will be taken to Parliament for consideration next month. The board of the National Identification and Registration Authority (NIRA) chaired by the Hon Custos Conrad Pitkin, is in place to oversee the operations of the National Identification System.



Madam Speaker, to roll out the National ID, 23 Post Offices across Jamaica will be renovated and used as NIDS enrollment sites. The procurement process for eight (8) of these - Montego Bay, Black River, May Pen, Santa Cruz, Falmouth, St. Ann's Bay, Ocho Rios, and Mandeville - has been completed and work will begin shortly.

The renovated Post Offices will double as Digital Service Points which will become dedicated areas for people to receive help and have access to digital services free of charge.

The NIDS project in conjunction with the Registrar General Department have digitally scanned and stored 1.4 million civil registration documents. At the end of this exercise, we would have scanned 2.246 million birth, death, marriage, adoption, and deed poll records, thereby creating a database of documents that would not require physical retrieval and enable several online services.

Madam Speaker, a functional Data Protection Act and operational body is a prerequisite for the rollout of the national ID. Last year, significant provisions of the Data Protection Act came into force, including the requirement of data controllers to register. The Office of Information Commissioner has launched its official portal through which data controllers can register.

We know that the new Data Protection Act requirements are a concern for many businesses especially the MSME sector.

Last year, we granted a further six months extension for data controllers to prepare for compliance with the provisions of the Act. We are now actively exploring how we can provide further time especially to our MSMEs. To this end, the Office of the Information Commissioner will be following general international best practice by adopting a strategic approach to the implementation of the Data Protection Act. Upon the end of the grace period in June 2024, the Office of Information Commissioner will only commence registration with controllers in the following categories:

1. Ministries, Departments and Agencies of Government;
2. High risk sectors such as financial, health, education, tourism and ICT services;
3. Other businesses that conduct data processing on a large scale or that have a significant risk of prejudice to a large number of data subjects; and
4. Data controllers who are required to appoint a Data Protection Officer

The Office of the Information Commissioner will publish the categories of controllers who will be required to be registered at the end of the extension and persons can liaise with the OIC to clarify whether or not they need to register in June.

Madam Speaker, we believe this approach balances the rights and interests of the people without placing an unnecessary regulatory burden on small businesses. **We are a listening**

Government and we are doing what we can to address the concerns raised by implementing the Data Protection Act in a strategic and responsible manner.

SECURITY

Lowest Levels of Crime in 24 Years

Madam Speaker, the multi-faceted approach taken by the Government including social transformational initiatives, strategic investments in technology and infrastructure, and legislative changes, is paying dividends with a sharp reduction in major crimes, the country's lowest crime rate in twenty-four (24) years.

Jamaica recorded a 10% reduction in major crimes (murders, shootings, rapes, robberies, aggravated assault, and break-ins) in 2023 when compared to 2022 and this downward trend has continued in 2024. Notably, the number of active gangs in Jamaica decreased by approximately 36% in 2023, to an estimated 176 active gangs, down from an estimated 276 known gangs in 2018.

Former Commissioner of Police Major General Anderson, can claim meaningful progress and success in the transformation of the JCF, in organisational leadership, structure, doctrine and culture, infrastructure and technology, and in operational strategy and tactics. We are now beginning to see the positive impact of the transformed JCF as a Force for Good.

Madam Speaker, let me express our appreciation and commendation to Major General Antony Anderson for a career of effective leadership and sterling service to Jamaica's National Security. I also welcome Dr. Kevin Blake, our new Commissioner, and task him to continue the transformation of the JCF.

Madam Speaker, the government continues to invest significantly in the transformation of the JCF:

- We continue to build out the human resources of the force to keep ahead of attrition and commensurate with the law and order challenge, through a robust programme of recruitment and training of over 2,000 officers.
- We are procuring an additional 280 cameras to be installed in Downtown Kingston under the Jamaica Eye Programme
- We are investing approximately \$650M in the JCF's mobile radio network and microwave data network to improve its communications infrastructure, increasing island-wide coverage from 67% to 90% by 2028.
- We continue to upgrade and renew the JCF's fleet with the procurement of over **1600 motor vehicles to date**.

- Twenty-nine (29) **police facilities** are slated for renovation this financial year with investments amounting to approximately **\$460 million** under the project (ROC) initiative, which is aimed at converting all police stations into modern, citizen friendly workplaces.

We intend to start construction of the St. Catherine North Police Station and the Westmoreland Divisional HQ for which ground was broken last Friday.

Impact of ZOSOs

Madam Speaker, the Government's social intervention programmes in communities affected by high crime rates are mainly effected through the Jamaica Social Investment Fund (JSIF) under the Zones of Special Operations. These are designed to be long term interventions which will focus on the improvement of amenities, infrastructure and human resource development in the designated communities. The physical and social transformation in many of these spaces is evident. I will just mention a few:

- Rehabilitation of just over 17.5km of roadways and the build out of water and drainage infrastructure in Mount Salem, Denham Town, Greenwich Town and August Town at a cost of just over \$750 million.
- Seven primary schools in Denham Town, Greenwich Town and Mount Salem have been rehabilitated at a cost of approximately \$138 million. Two primary schools are currently being rehabilitated in August Town.
Three primary schools have also benefited from the creation of safe passages which is important for students to traverse main corridors on the way to and from school.
- Creation/rehabilitation of 14 parks and green spaces
- 289 microenterprises provided with critical equipment and tools, business development training and business registration services.

The Zones of Special Operations have yielded success in the reduction of murders in the seven (7) designated communities, namely Mt. Salem, Denham Town, Greenwich Town, August Town, Norwood, Parade Gardens and Savanna-la-Mar. These communities collectively recorded a 40% reduction in murders when we compare pre-ZOSO figures of 2017 with 2023.

ENVIRONMENT

Madam Speaker, the world is facing a triple planetary crisis made up of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, in particular plastic pollution.

Jamaica is not immune to any of the elements of this crisis. This is why this Government has pursued a progressive, green agenda. Though our suite of policies and legislative actions have been acknowledged both locally and internationally, we continue to work diligently to ensure that our governance framework is fit for purpose to deal with the environmental and climatic challenges we face while also creating an enabling investment environment.

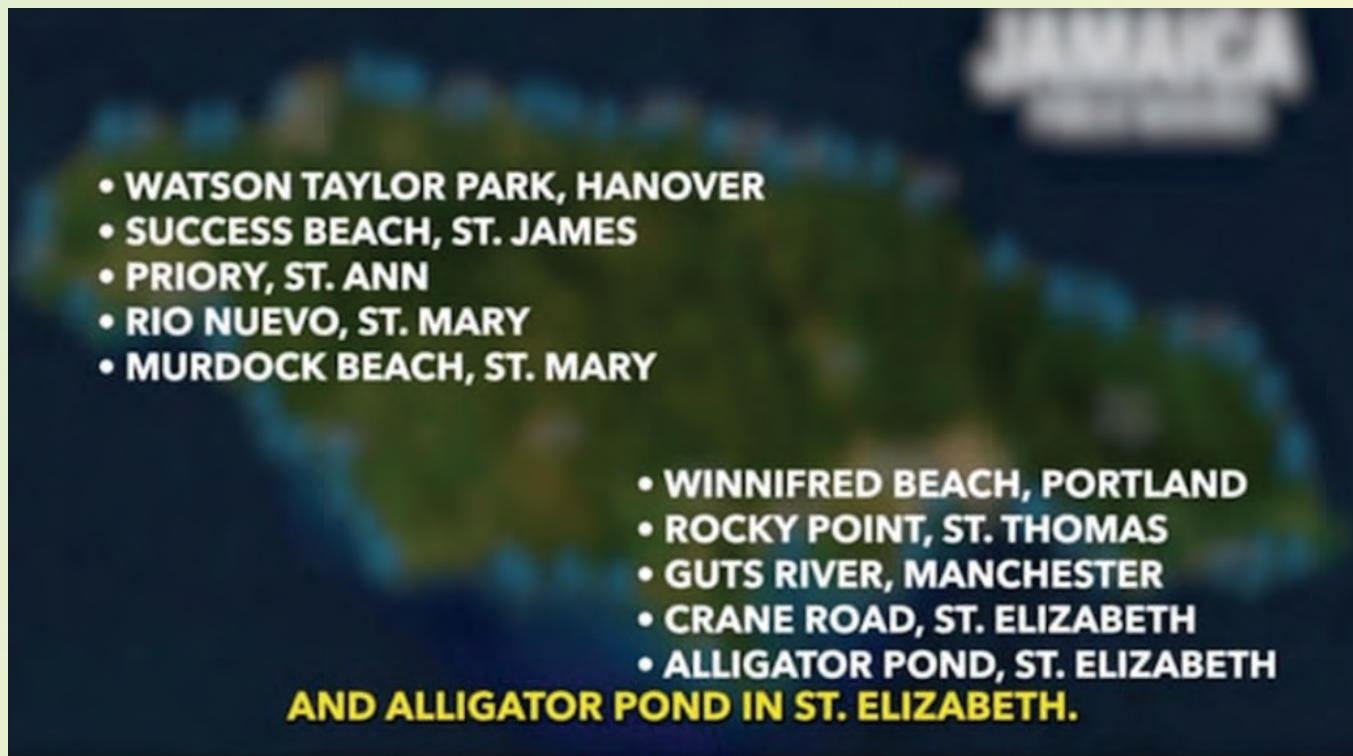


Madam Speaker, planning which facilitates orderly development is a critical pillar to sound environmental management. Last year you will recall that we confirmed the Kingston and St. Andrew Pedro Cays Development Order. We are actively working to complete Parish Development Orders for St Thomas, St Elizabeth, Hanover and St James. I am happy to report the promulgation of the Portmore Confirmed Development Order. I am also happy to report that NEPA has completed the Master Plans for Constant Spring, Half Way Tree, and Negril.

Beach access

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to report that the Beach Access and Management Policy is complete and will be tabled at the next sitting of the House. This Policy seeks to ensure Jamaica's beaches are preserved, and sustainably managed for present and future generations, and provision is made for access of Jamaicans and visitors alike.

Madam Speaker, I am happy to announce that the Government will be upgrading a number of beaches across the island for public access. The existing Fantasy Beach Park in Priory St Ann will be developed into a Parish Beach Park, similar to Harmony Beach Park in Montego Bay. The Government will be upgrading work on another nine (9) free community beaches this year. Beyond 2024/25, we will develop the Boston Beach Park in Portland and a major beach park in Negril.



Climate Change

Jamaica is on the front lines of the changing climate, and shifting weather patterns. We have already seen the impacts on coastal communities with rising sea levels causing erosion, salt water intrusion in our water supply, and deteriorating soil quality. We are particularly vulnerable because 70% of Jamaica's population lives within 5 km of the sea.

Coastal assessments and hazard maps have been completed for eight (8) priority coastal areas. We have already successfully implemented the JA\$1.3 billion Port Royal Street Revetment that protects 1 km of shoreline and the adjacent economic assets, transport routes and communities in Downtown Kingston. In the coming year, the budget includes funding for a revetment at Buff Bay in Portland, and shoreline protection at Annotto Bay in St. Mary.

We are building financial buffers to strengthen our resilience to climate-related shocks. This is why Jamaica has engaged the IMF with the Resilience and Sustainability Fund in addition to an emergency line of credit for Climatic Shocks.

We will also renew the Catastrophe Bond to guard against catastrophic weather events.

Madam Speaker, the global community has an established structure for how it makes Climate Finance available to developing countries. Jamaica continues to call for reform, however it is using the existing structures to enable access to finance for decarbonization and adaptation.

Madam Speaker, I am proud to report that the Development Bank of Jamaica has been accredited by the Green Climate Fund as a National Direct Access Entity that allows for application and implementation of large climate projects of over US\$250 million. This accreditation is the largest received for a national entity within the Caribbean.

Biodiversity Loss

Madam Speaker, one of the most significant steps that can be taken to halt and reverse biodiversity loss, is the protection of both 30% of our terrestrial landmass and territorial waters. The "30 by 30" target was established in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, adopted in December 2022.

Jamaica is well poised to complete declarations facilitating legal protection of more than 30% of our landmass by 2025, as we are currently at approximately 25%. This has been made possible by declarations last year of the Black River and Pedro Cays Protected Areas (both declared under the NRCA Act).

I am happy to announce that today I will table Jamaica's Omnibus Protected Areas Policy Green Paper. Madam Speaker, in the coming fiscal year, we will complete declarations of protection under the NRCA Act for the following five (5) areas:

- Canoe Valley, which borders Manchester and Clarendon
- Montpelier, St. James
- Long Mountain, St. Andrew
- Industry Cove, Hanover
- Bengal, St. Ann

Madam Speaker, all of the areas identified were designated as Ecologically Sensitive Areas during my last presentation in the budget debate.

Additionally, your Government will declare twenty three (23) parcels of Crown lands as forest reserves or forest management areas under the Forest Act in 2024/25.

Madam Speaker, it is also to be noted that we completed our "Protected Areas Regulations" in this fiscal year solidifying the framework to be used for management of these areas.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Economic Growth & Job Creation will collaborate with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Mining to increase the island's network of fish sanctuaries, by expanding existing ones and establishing new sanctuaries under the Fisheries Act. We will also pursue amendment of the Marine Park Regulations to simplify the administration of user fees.

In response to the increasing challenges posed to the island's natural waterways, the Government will commence work on the development of a National Wetlands and Freshwater Policy for Jamaica.

Pollution

Madam Speaker, the issue of pollution is complex. Our economic and social activities generate waste, whether solid, liquid or air pollutants (emissions). Though we cannot dive into each of these today, there are two areas where I will highlight some of the steps being taken to reduce pollution in Jamaica.

Plastics

Firstly, the issue of plastics within our waste stream. **Madam Speaker**, in 2019 and 2020, Jamaica led the region with the first phases of a ban on specific types of single-use plastics. Jamaica is happy with the progress of the International Negotiating Committee to develop a Global Plastic Treaty. We are, however, working to ensure that when this treaty is finalised, Jamaica is well ahead of its targets and requirements. As such, allow me to highlight the suite of measures that will be taken in the coming financial year:

- Jamaica will complete its national policy on the environmental sound management of single-use plastics.
- We will this year begin to separate waste, in particular plastic waste, at all government facilities nationally.
- Jamaica will also enter phase 4 of the ban on some plastic materials on June 1 of this year. This phase will include a ban on the manufacture, import and distribution of single-use plastic lunch boxes, and on personal care products using micro plastics.

Madam Speaker, invariably when the issues of a plastic ban are raised, the natural question is, “what are we doing about plastic bottles”? Prior to the pandemic, approximately 7% of all plastic bottles were being collected. That percentage has increased significantly to 30%. In 2023, 278 million bottles were collected; five years ago it was only 60 million. We will continue to work with the National Solid Waste Management Authority and Recycling Partners of Jamaica to further ramp up collection and recycling.

Legislation

Madam Speaker, it is well known that the fines in both the NRCA Act and the Wildlife Protection Act do not function as sufficient deterrent to polluters, and in some cases rogue developers. This is why your government will be tabling for debate, amendments to raise the fines in both pieces of legislation from a JA\$50,000 ceiling under the NRCA Act and a JA\$1.5million ceiling under the Wild Life Protection Act to a JA\$5 million ceiling in both pieces of legislation for individuals, but JA\$10 million for Bodies Corporate.

Madam Speaker, the relationship between sound environmental management, and the health and resilience of our water supply is obvious. So, today I am happy to **table Jamaica’s new watershed policy (white paper)**.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Madam Speaker, we can all agree that education is a key enabler of a productive and caring economy. Our growth trajectory is limited by the level of our human resource development.

There is no doubt that our education system produces some of the brightest minds, pro-social, pro-growth, emotionally intelligent and skilled citizen workers. The problem is that the education system is not even and consistent across the society in creating the human resources necessary to enable Jamaica to move to a higher growth trajectory. And the problem is exacerbated by a significant percentage of our best trained human resources migrating to build other economies. It is easy to make the observation that Jamaica has a low wage economy. The more difficult question is how do we attract higher paying jobs.

A part of the answer to this question is that we need to increase the level of socio-emotional intelligence throughout our society and we must increase the level of market aligned skills our workers possess.

If every child leaving primary school was literate and numerate at the highest level, able to control their behaviour, think critically and problem-solve, and had a positive attitude towards society and authority; and if those children went to secondary education and further enhanced those fundamental characteristics with functional skills and competencies in areas that support market demands, developed the confidence to be innovative, and the freedom of thought to be creative, with a sense of social responsibility and good citizenship; Jamaica would have a different look and feel and we would be able to attract and sustain higher order industries and jobs on a wider scale. This is why we undertook a review of the education and training system to inform a plan to transform it.

The transformation of the education system is underway. An implementation plan has broken down the 365 recommendations under the Patterson Report into short, medium and long-term initiatives that span seven pillars:

- Governance & Accountability,
- Early Childhood Development,
- Teaching, Curriculum & Teacher Training,
- Tertiary Sector,
- TVET in Jamaica,
- Infrastructure & Technology,
- Finance.

Madam Speaker, I want all stakeholders to appreciate that transformation of the education system is a massive undertaking. The system comprises 1,010 public schools, 2,400 ECIs, 500 prep and private high schools, 21 tertiary institutions, 600,000 students, 25,000 teachers, and more. There have been several attempts at transformation over the years with varying degrees of success. We have learnt from these past efforts. The comprehensive transformation that we are all seeking is going to take time and we are proceeding in a structured and sustainable way. The independent Education Transformation Oversight Committee which was established to monitor, oversee and report to the public on the progress of implementation, reported last week that of the 101 recommendations that were targeted for implementation to date, 97 are on track.

Madam Speaker, this administration is serious about giving our students the opportunities to access higher education and skills as we seek to move from a low wage economy to a high productivity economy. In addition to the removal of the guarantor requirement for student loans, the Government will make available \$200 million to provide tuition support for at least 1,000 students who show that they are in good academic standing with their tertiary institution, but are in need of financial support. This support will be administered through the Ministry of

Education in conjunction with the CDF, where each constituency will be allocated approximately JA\$3,000,000 and each beneficiary can get a maximum tuition grant of JA\$200,000.

Madam Speaker, I now turn focus to the HEART/NSTA Trust.

Putting the Heart back in HEART

The HEART/NSTA Trust was conceptualized by the Most Honourable Edward Seaga in 1982 with the mission to reduce unemployment and create a dynamic and skilled labour force in Jamaica. Even though unemployment today is at a record low of 4.2%, that mission remains as relevant as it was in 1982.

Madam Speaker, for the first time in our independent history, we face a new challenge. On one hand, we have a myriad of business leaders speaking to the shortage of labour in growing sectors of the economy. On the other hand, we have too many persons across the length and breadth of Jamaica who are not sufficiently engaged in meaningful work. For the first time in our independent history, we can say to every Jamaican Youth, if you are willing to work and acquire a skill, there is a job for you. When we say, every Youth is a Star, this is not a pipe dream in today's Jamaica, it is an achievable reality.

The HEART/NSTA Trust has a pivotal role to play in this. **Madam Speaker**, we are revitalizing and re-energising HEART – we are putting the Heart Back into HEART!

LIFT Update

Madam Speaker, last year I announced the Learning and Investment for Transformation (LIFT) Programme designed to provide secondary school leavers with structured assimilation into the workforce.

I am pleased to report that five hundred and six (506) participants from the first cycle of the programme have been placed in public and private sector organisations across the country. They are currently developing on-the-job skills while earning a monthly income of \$85,000, with \$15,000 reserved as compulsory savings that will be released at the end of the 1-year job placement. The trainees under the LIFT programme come with a fairly high level of secondary level certification but they lack work experience. The LIFT programme is designed to improve their work readiness and prepare them for high functioning jobs.

An important component of the LIFT Programme is that the enrollees are assisted with social mobility documents (TRN, passport, NIS, bank account and driver's licence).

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to acknowledge one of our LIFT students in the gallery. As you know, the LIFT participants were taken from all 63 constituencies and the programme was oversubscribed. With us today is Akela Simpson who is from my own constituency of St. Andrew



West Central. Akela is currently working at the CHASE Fund and has all her social documents and is learning to drive.

The programme has been a success and we are getting ready for another intake under the programme.

We empower our youth and let them know “you can do it and the Government is here to help”.

CARE: Community Action for Rewarding Engagement

Madam Speaker, it is important to note that more than 120,000 trainees have enrolled in HEART since the removal of fee. Using Statin's October 2023 figures, our labour force stands at 1,377,600 out of a working age population of 14 years and older of 2,102,200 this gives a relatively labour force participation rate of over 65%. There are 724,600 persons 14 years and older who are not in the labour force. These are persons registered in schools or training institutions, retired and elderly, persons taking care of their household and families, and persons who for other reasons are not available for work or are not seeking to be employed. It should be noted that 95.8% of the labour force or 1,320,400 persons are employed.

The unemployment rate is 4.2% which represents 57,300 persons unemployed. In any economy there is always a base level of unemployment due to structural changes in the economy, business go out of operation, particular skills become obsolete and workers are out of a job while they retool and new business come into operation, and there is frictional unemployment where the worker voluntarily changing jobs and there is a lag between leaving one job and finding another. In addition to ensuring that labour is trained and constantly upskilled in relevant areas aligned to market demand, in this era of virtual full employment, HEART must play the leading role in attracting persons into the workforce.

As I travel across Jamaica I come up on many young persons who should be working, who say they want to work, some say they have certification, some say they have skills, but can't find a job. The youth (14-24 years) unemployment rate was 12.6 per cent or 26,200. This must be a special area of focus for HEART, we must find these young and not-so-young Jamaicans where they are and develop programmes to increase their employability.

This year, the HEART/NSTA Trust will introduce the **Community Action for Rewarding Engagement (CARE) Initiative** to reach every young man and woman who is not working and is not enrolled in a training programme. HEART will be proactive in finding you and bringing you to the well of training. If our economy is to grow we need every Jamaica who can work to enter the labour force.

The CARE Initiative will be activated in all 63 constituencies. Each Member of Parliament will be asked to identify 30 young persons from their constituency using predetermined selection



parameters set by the programme. A specialized team in HEART will go to their house or meet them on the corner to engage with and enrol them into programmes that will enhance their employability.

Madam Speaker, as I travel across Jamaica and I speak to our young people, they tell me that making HEART free of tuition is great, but some of them struggle to find the money for transportation or to buy lunch. They say, "Prime Minister, I want to come do the training, but I don't have the bus fare. I want to get a skill, but I don't have lunch money."

This is the dilemma. This is why we have decided that every student enrolled in HEART under the new CARE initiative will receive a monthly transportation grant of \$15,000 to offset transportation costs to the HEART institution that they will be enrolled in. This grant will be tied to their attendance at training. We will go even further; ALL trainees under the CARE programme will receive an additional stipend of \$13,000 per week for the duration of their training. For some persons who will reach through this programme, extensive training may not be required, job placement, mentorship and career guidance may be all that is needed. HEART will arrange this as well.

We recognize the urgent nature of the problem of shortage of skilled labour, I would go as far to say that it is now a national emergency. We must do everything possible, including moral suasion and incentivization to bring more Jamaicans back into the labour force. In this regard, though HEART must lead the effort, it cannot do it alone. HEART will partner with well-structured and accountable entities on initiatives to attract and train more Jamaicans in the workforce.

HEART/NSTA Trust is currently partnering with Project STAR, not outsourcing, in five (5) communities: Rose Gardens and Parade Gardens in Downtown Kingston; Savanna-la-Mar in Westmoreland; May Pen West in Clarendon; and Salt Spring in St. James to reach unemployed and unattached youth in those communities.

Last year I announced that HEART will partner with the JDF to add a component to the Jamaica National Service Corp programme to leverage the excellent training and character development capabilities of the JDF. This programme is still in the planning phase and we expect to begin roll-out later in the coming Fiscal Year. The JNSC programme continues to provide an avenue for Jamaica's youth to access regimented training, serve their country and earn. Since the start of the programme in June 2017, a total of six thousand two hundred and twenty (6,220) persons have been trained, five thousand seventy (5,070) males and one thousand one hundred and fifty (1,150) females. To date, four thousand two hundred and fifty-nine (4,259) candidates have transitioned into the JDF.

Other participants in the programme have been certified and prepared for the job market where they are highly sought after by employers in security and technical fields.



Uplift On-the-Job Training

Madam Speaker, one critical sector that has signalled their need for additional labour is construction. We have developed an accelerated apprenticeship programme in partnership with some construction firms which will involve:

- a three-month pre-apprenticeship period to develop employability skills as well as technical competencies.
- a seven-month immersive training placement on the construction site for four (4) days and in the HEART institution for (1) one day.
- an on-the-job mentorship phase
- assessment and certification - following seven-months of on-the-job exposure (the apprenticeship period), trainees will be assessed and certified accordingly.

This creative approach will make the training in construction more aligned to industry needs and we will be able to put persons to work in a shorter time frame.

Tools for Trade Initiative

Madam Speaker, this administration believes economic independence and self-empowerment - not everyone will be an employee. We need more self-employed and young people who are entrepreneurial. Having removed tuition fees for all HEART programmes up to level 4. This year, we are building on that. Starting April 1, 2024, every successful graduate of a level 4 trade programme will receive a grant of \$50,000 to help them acquire the tools of their trade and to step up to the next stage of their career. For those who are on PATH or are Wards of the State, this grant will be increased to \$75,000.

Additionally, starting next financial year, the HEART/NSTA Trust will open a special grant facility of up to \$100,000 for HEART-certified trainees who have registered a trade or business that has been operating for more than one year. The beneficiaries will also be assisted in refining their business plan, executing marketing activities, further capacity building and other forms of technical support.

Madam Speaker, while we are on the subject of supporting graduating trainees, I should also mention that the Development Bank of Jamaica has introduced the Tradesperson Ownership Opportunity Loan (TOOL) Programme, which will be launched in June 2024. Under the TOOL Programme, loans will be offered to small contractors through DBJ partner institutions at an interest rate of 9%, for up to 24 months and will provide up to \$500,000 per applicant to assist with acquiring or upgrading their tools.

These grants and technical assistance are a deliberate effort to provide our trainees and small businesses with meaningful support to increase their productivity and grow their businesses.

Skills on Demand Portal

Madam Speaker, this year the HEART/NSTA Trust will launch the Skills on Demand portal which will connect skilled professionals with potential employers and clients.

If you need a plumber to fix a leak at your house, you will be able to go on the Skills on Demand portal and identify plumbing professionals who have registered and have verified certification from HEART. Skilled professionals will be able to advertise their skills, their previous employer ratings, and their current location to potential employers and clients. Potential employers and clients will benefit from access to an array of talent that has been vetted and they will have the ability to post specific job openings to individuals with the required skills.

Madam Speaker, we are a listening Government, we are a learning Government, we are a caring and responsive Government. We have listened to our young people, we have listened to businesses who are clamouring for trained workers, and we are responding. We believe that by training and upskilling our workforce we can break this vicious cycle of a low wage economy. A skilled labour force is an attraction in itself for investments and location of high value high productivity jobs. Labour will drive growth and create a virtuous cycle of productivity and prosperity for all.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Roads

Madam Speaker, I now turn my attention to the build-out of Jamaica's road infrastructure. The vision of a more seamless, connected Jamaica is taking shape.



Southern Coastal Highway Improvement Project (SCHIP)

The Southern Coastal Highway Improvement Project (SCHIP) is the largest integrated road infrastructure project ever undertaken in Jamaica.

The Harbour View to Yallahs Bridge leg of the highway was officially opened in February of this year.

This impressive 17.4 kilometres of roadway has significantly reduced travel time between Kingston and St. Thomas from 45 to 15 minutes. Along with the roadway, there has been the installation of approximately 28 kilometres of water lines, 350 metres of sewer lines, and 17.8 metres of fibre optic ducts, benefiting 348 properties. This Government gets things done!

Madam Speaker, at the completion of works on the stretch of road leading to Morant Bay, I intend to officially name the highway, the Right Excellent Paul Bogle Highway in honour of our National Hero who gave his life in the struggle against oppression and injustice in Jamaica. When the new chapter of St Thomas is written, it will show that this administration has done the most for the people of St. Thomas. We have brought roads, water, jobs, industries, and development to what is now the 'Renaissance Parish'.

The Government is now focused on completing the Yallahs Bridge to Port Antonio and the Morant Bay to Cedar Valley legs of the highway which will open up that corridor with water, broadband and sewer lines in some areas.

The Government is now concentrating efforts on commencing the Port Antonio Bypass Project in the coming fiscal year. The bypass will unfold in two phases. Phase 1 from Norwich to Turtle Crawl Harbour (7 km) and Phase 2 from Turtle Crawl Harbour to Boston Bay (11 km), aligning with the goals of the Southern Coastal Highway Improvement Project. Currently, GOJ is exploring Phase 1, estimated at approximately US\$82 million, with a duration of 24 months, aiming to improve access to growing townships and mitigate coastal risks.

Madam Speaker, the long-awaited May Pen to Williamsfield leg of the highway, was opened in September 2023. This 27-kilometre stretch has not only slashed travel time from May Pen to Williamsfield to approximately 15 minutes but has also ignited interest in development along its path. Private sector interest in developing lands along the corridor for housing and agriculture has surged, promising economic growth and opportunity. The Security Forces and Jamaica Fire Brigade have welcomed this vital artery, facilitating easier access to communities once difficult to reach.

Moreover, the strengthened link between Mandeville Regional Hospital and the UHWI and KPH in Kingston has reduced transport times, saving precious lives.



Madam Speaker, TransJamaican Highway Limited (TJH), which operates the East-West Highway from Caymanas to May Pen under a Concession Agreement, has a Right of First Refusal to operate the new May Pen to Williamsfield Highway. TJH has exercised their right under the Concession Agreement by making an offer to the Government of Jamaica. This offer is being evaluated by independent financial advisors and negotiations are ongoing. In order to facilitate conclusion of these negotiations, the toll-free period is being extended until July 1, 2024.

Madam Speaker, I noted last year that we would be moving further along from Williamsfield, Manchester to Hodges, St. Elizabeth. This extension will also include:

- A Northern Mandeville Bypass
- A Spur Tree Bypass
- A Junction Town Bypass
- A Southfield Bypass, and
- A Black River Bypass.

Value engineering exercises have been performed to reduce the projected cost of the project while increasing functionality.

Madam Speaker, the residents of South St. Elizabeth will be a part of the stakeholder consultation process to ensure their input is obtained and incorporated from the design stage of this project.

Montego Bay Perimeter Road

Madam Speaker, I am happy to report that the Montego Bay Perimeter Road Project is progressing steadily and is already approximately 30% complete. As a reminder, the Project includes:

- a. The Montego Bay Bypass Road. (15km)
- b. The Long Hill Bypass. (11km)
- c. The Barnett Street/West Green Avenue Road Rehabilitation, and
- d. A Comprehensive Drainage Study of the Montego Bay Bypass area.

North Coast Highway

Madam Speaker, I now turn to the North Coast Highway. The North Coast Highway Public Private Partnership will see the expansion of the North Coast Highway from Sea Castles in St. James to Mammee Bay in St. Ann from two lanes to four lanes.

As part of the due diligence process, a number of studies have been completed including traffic studies as well as environmental and social impact studies. The requisite documentation is now

being compiled with an aim to launch the tender process in the 4th quarter of the calendar year.

Lucea/Hopewell Bypass

Madam Speaker, the old coastal towns of Lucea and Hopewell in Hanover did not benefit from modern urban planning best practices. In fact, they both date back hundreds of years to a time when horse and buggy were the common mode of transportation. The roads through the towns are now major bottlenecks.

The Lucea/Hopewell bypass will be a four-lane highway that starts at a grade separated intersection along the new Long Hill Bypass that is currently being constructed. The alignment will then traverse westward for approximately 30 kilometres, with link roads to the main road before and after the town of Hopewell before terminating on the westward side of the town of Lucea.

Local Roads & Bridges – SPARK and Special CAPEX programmes

Madam Speaker, in the KMA, a primary focus for the Government in 2024/25 is the Washington Boulevard Improvement Project, stretching from New Haven to Dunrobin Avenue. The NWA has been tasked with developing detailed engineering designs to enhance this corridor. The project's scope encompasses not only traffic flow optimization but also endeavours to elevate visual appeal, recognizing its pivotal role as a gateway into our capital city. Moreover, essential infrastructure installations such as water networks and fibre optic cabling will be facilitated to augment broadband connectivity and public services.

Madam Speaker, I know Jamaicans are listening to my presentation with concerns about their community roads. The issue of roads is often a pain point with complaints of dodging potholes and replacing front-end parts.

Over the past few weeks on the campaign trail, one of the most frequently asked questions was “Prime Minister, weh ya do bout we road?”.

The point must be made that the deplorable state of our roads has not happened since 2016, it is the result of decades of neglect and inadequate maintenance even before our Independence in 1962. Today, there are 22,000 kilometres of roadways in Jamaica, and we estimate that roughly half of them are in a state of disrepair.

Many politicians over the years have promised the people to fix their roads. Lest we forget, in 2002, a former Minister of Government promised that Jamaica would be “pothole-free” by 2003. My administration is not merely promising that we will fix your roads, we are today coming to the people of Jamaica with a multi-faceted plan to focus resources on improving the state of our local roads over the next 10 years of Jamaica’s development.



This will be one of the largest investments in roads from our capital expenditure that we have ever seen!

The Government's multi-billion road improvement plan to address the country's road transport network will be executed through two programmes - the **Special Capital Expenditure (CAPEX) Programme** and the new **Shared Prosperity through Accelerated Improvement to our Road Network (SPARK) Programme**.

We have commenced the first of six CAPEX projects targeting urban corridors in Kingston and Portmore. In December 2023, the dualization of Grange Lane, which connects Portmore to Spanish Town, commenced and drainage and potable water pipeline works are underway.

The remaining five projects are East Kings House /Lady Musgrave Road, Braeton/Hellshire Road, Arthur Wint Drive / Tom Redcam / Camp Road, New Access to Portmore and the Sandy Gully Bridge Widening Project are expected to complete the Public Investment Appraisal Process during the first and third quarter of fiscal 2024-25 and head in to procurement shortly thereafter.

In the coming Fiscal Year 2024/2025, we will begin the roll out of the Shared Prosperity through Accelerated Improvement to our Road Network (SPARK) programme, which is an allocation of over \$40 billion over two years. Of the overall total of \$40 billion, \$20 billion has been earmarked for secondary community and parish council roads in every constituency. This \$20 billion will be allocated to constituencies as follows:

- Approximately half will be divided equally per constituency, that is \$150 million per constituency
- The balance will be allocated to constituencies based on the mileage of roads in each constituency as well as the condition of the roads. This process will require mapping and on-the-ground assessments as in some cases, the data is very old.

Madam Speaker, even with this massive allocation, we cannot fix all the roads at the same time. Therefore the people will have an opportunity to express their views as to which roads get fixed first, through a fair, transparent, and accountable process.

It is imperative that the people, represented by their elected officials, play a significant role in the identification and selection of projects. Instead of having people protesting and blocking roads, let's all come together, in a democratic process, to determine the priority for roads to be repaired.

Given the mandate of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in fostering community empowerment and promoting socio-economic progress by allocating funds through elected MPs, it is deemed an ideal vehicle for conducting the consultative process and identifying suitable projects for the SPARK programme. These consultations between citizens and their

representatives (Members of Parliament and Councillors) are being arranged and I know many constituencies are ready to start.

Madam Speaker, the SPARK programme is no small feat, more than 2,000 roads across Jamaica will be rehabilitated and modernized under this programme.

This is a major operation that will see more than just road improvements in communities. This programme will see –

- Pavement Resurfacing / Rehabilitation
- Intersection Improvement at strategic locations
- Sidewalk Rehabilitation in the Capitals and Towns
- Retaining Wall Construction along critical corridors
- Drainage Improvement
- Waterline improvements (as needed)
- Fibre optic ducts

Additionally, let me note that this Government will not be doing what was done in the past where roads are repaired and then dug back up to repair pipes and address water issues. Instead, we will be allocating an additional \$5 billion as a contingency in the next Budget to address road infrastructure where water and sewer repairs are critical to a wider community and the cost of such repairs would significantly deplete the allocation for the constituency.

Madam Speaker, the government will put to international tender, for enterprise level contractors to undertake the works which will be divided into 4 packages (North, South, East and West).

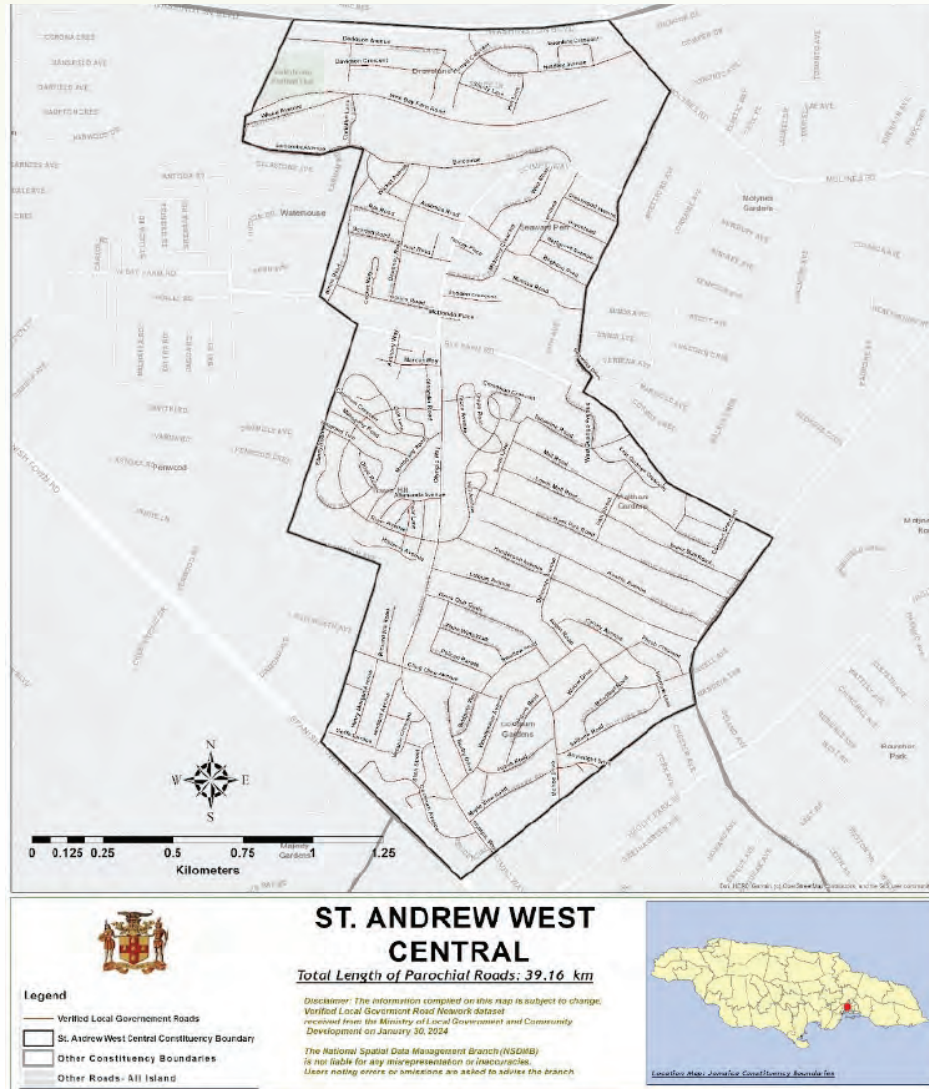
The relevant rate-based Request for Proposal documents have already been completed and consultation with the Ministry of Finance and the Public Procurement Commission are ongoing to ensure the process when launched is seamless. Enterprise level contractors are expected to have the engineering, project management, and financial wherewithal necessary to execute a project of this size and nature. It should be understood by all that these enterprise level contractors would find it necessary to subcontract with smaller local contractors.

Madam Speaker, while we work to address decades of neglect of our roads, we must at the same time design and implement a proper system of ongoing maintenance of our roads - including routine patching, sealing of the road, cleaning and bushing where necessary. We must never allow our infrastructure to degrade to this level ever again.

I am pleased to announce that the Government will be working towards the creation of a Centralized National Road Registry which will be a census of all existing roads in Jamaica.

The Registry will contain information on the geographic location and establishment of ownership of these roads which will inform future maintenance activity. The Spatial Data

Management Division of the Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation will be critical in providing geospatial data of local roads to complete this database. This will be supported by on-the-ground site inspections.



Madam Speaker, the Government will create a platform for the public to go online and see the status of your community road.

They will be able to see the public body that has responsibility for the road, when last it was repaired as well as the next scheduled maintenance date. It will also include a facility for residents to be able to make geotagged reports on damage or hazards to the relevant authorities.

Madam Speaker, the SPARK Programme is a two year project commitment to a JA\$40b expenditure on roads, it is clear however that for the next decade there must be elevated allocations towards road rehabilitation maintenance if we are to bring our roadways to

reasonable standards. Having now properly audited all our roads we can now prepare a comprehensive maintenance and repair schedule to realistically inform the budgetary allocation necessary to improve our roads in a reasonable time frame.

Madam Speaker, as we seek to upgrade road corridors, we recognize the ongoing need for waste management, debushing and maintenance throughout the year. Jamaica is a naturally beautiful place but our country is being “uglified” by plastic and other forms of waste on our roadways, gullies and drains.

To this end we will allocate \$2.5 billion to clean major gullies, drains and roadways across Jamaica. An important component of this project is that the persons employed to do the cleaning up must collect the plastics for recycling for which they will receive further payment when it is sold. I have had dialogue with Recycling Partners of Jamaica, who have an amazing system of purchasing and recycling plastic waste. We are incentivising cleaning and beautification through recycling.

Bridges, River Training, and Drain Cleaning

Madam Speaker, in 2024/25, the Government will prioritize three key bridge projects:

1. Troy Bridge (as mentioned earlier)
2. Craig Mill Bridge
3. Spring Village Bridge

Madam Speaker, given the pressing threats posed by climate change, disaster mitigation must be prioritised. I am pleased to announce the allocation of \$762 million for river training, drain and gully cleaning, and drainage improvement initiatives.

Through river training measures, the Government aims to regulate water flow patterns, minimize erosion, and protect riverbanks, thus, safeguarding nearby communities and vital infrastructure.

Kingston Metropolitan Area (KMA) Fibre Optics Project

Madam Speaker, the Government's Kingston Metropolitan Area (KMA) Fibre Optics Project has reached a significant milestone, with the completion of 31,179 metres of trenching, ducting, and cabling. In February 2024, the project has virtually achieved practical completion, with 94% progress. Notably, this effort has linked crucial government entities, including eGov Jamaica Limited (eGov), the National Works Agency (NWA), the Ministry of Finance and the Public Service (MOFPS), and the Jamaica Urban Transit Company (JUTC).

The project demonstrates the Government of Jamaica's commitment to improving connectivity and enhancing the delivery of online public services to its citizens.

Madam Speaker, we are getting things done for better Jamaica for all.



WATER

Madam Speaker, Jamaica's ambition and commitment to providing all Jamaicans, with potable water and sanitation, are well articulated in "Vision 2030". It is well known that Jamaica has underinvested in its water systems. Much of our infrastructure for potable water and sewage is either aged beyond its useful life or inadequate to serve communities which have grown beyond design capacity. This would also apply to our national irrigation systems.

NATIONAL WATER COMMISSION CAPITAL PROGRAMME FOR THE PERIOD 2024-2025

PROJECTS	Number of Beneficiary	Estimated Cost
POTABLE WATER		
NWC's Islandwide Water Supply Programme		
Jordon Run Well No. 3 - Agualta Vale W/S: Richmond / Highgate & Islington	37,762	160,000,000.00
Black River W/S: Exchange Drive to Town Centre Pipeline	400	
Black River W/S: Town Centre to Arlington/Parottee Pipeline	4,000	238,000,000.00
Dornoch W/S - Baron Hill Reservoir Replacement (200K Gal)	11,000	20,000,000.00
Rock River W/S: Rehabilitation of Existing Source and Transmission Pipeline	3,000	75,000,000.00
Storage Tanks Improvement: Supply & Installation of 5 No. Glass Fused Bolted Steel Tanks - Hope, Mount Airy, Lewisville, Happy Grove & Whitehall	15,000	194,000,000.00
Hermitage Dam Rehabilitation Works - Phase 1: Consultancy Services		151,027,200.00
Jericho Well No. 1: Ewarton to York Street Pipeline	3,000	98,000,000.00
Morant Bay W/S: Springfield to Seafort & Morant Bay Upgrading Works	10,000	250,000,000.00
Port Royal WS Transmission Mains Replacement and M & E Upgrade	2,200	3,000,000.00
South Manchester WS - Grove Town to Cross Keys Mains Replacement /Upgrading (Material & Works)		210,000,000.00
Wakefield/Bunkers Hill Mains Upgrading Phase II - Extension Friendship to Unity Primary School	1,000	20,000,000.00
Bogue Well to Wilton Crossing, St Elizabeth - Mains Replacement		290,000,000.00
Christiana Spalding W/S: Two Meetings WTP M&E Rehabilitation	5,000	53,000,000.00
Christiana Spalding WS, Moravia WTP Access Bridge Re-Construction	4,000	70,000,000.00
Constant Spring WTP / Ram's Horn Tunnel Raw Water In-take and Roadway Rehabilitation - St Andrew		50,000,000.00
Essex Hall Water Supply W/S, St Andrew: New Works - WTP, Supply & Installation of Pipelines, Storage Tanks and M & E Equipment.		190,000,000.00

Jacks Hill Water Supply (Harriman, Mountain Spring & Seaview Transmission Mains)	10,000	315,000,000.00
Juno Crescent Well Development: M & E Equipment & Transmission Mains	1,500	220,000,000.00
Maggoty W/S: Maggoty to Newton Pipeline Extension Works	3,000	95,000,000.00
Mount Royal (Portmore) Booster Station Relocation & Upgrade	2,000	21,000,000.00
Rhyne Park Water Supply Upgrading; Rhyne Park/Edmund Ridge M&E, Pipeline Supply Construction	6,000	145,000,000.00
Rosemount/Camelot/ Discovery WS Upgrade - Supply & Installation of Pipelines, Storage Tanks and M & E Equipment.	3,500	120,000,000.00
Santa Cruz WS - Santa Cruz By-Pass Road Mains Repl.	1,200	50,000,000.00
Whitehall to Newmarket W/S: Well & Relift Stations, Tanks and Pipelines	3,000	158,000,000.00
Sub-Total		3,196,027,200.00
Greater Mandeville Water Supply Improvement Programme		
Greater Mandeville Water Supply Upgrade: Source Development, Supply & Installation of Pipelines, Storage Tanks and M & E Equipment.	10,000	770,000,000.00
Sub-Total		770,000,000.00
Operational Efficiency (Pump-Pipeline-Tank) Improvement Programme		
Tank Replacement/Upgrading to 100K Gal. - Windsor Castle (Portland), Farm Town (St Ann), Barnstaple (Trelawny) and Mount Olive (St Andrew).	25,000	342,000,000.00
Sub-Total		342,000,000.00
Major Potable Water Transmission Main Improvement Programme		
KSA TRANSMISSION MAINS Upgrading: Ferry to Rock Pond, St Andrew		404,000,000.00
Ferry to Rock Pond W/S - Supply & Installation of M&E Pumping Facilities		200,000,000.00
KSA TRANSMISSION MAINS Upgrading: Montgomery Corner to National Heroes Circle		50,000,000.00
TRANSMISSION MAINS Upgrading: Hellshire Main Road		50,000,000.00
TRANSMISSION MAINS Upgrading: Roaring River to Runaway Bay - Phase 1		100,000,000.00
TRANSMISSION MAINS Upgrading: Lucea to Negril - Phase 1		

Sub-Total		804,000,000.00
REGIONAL NRW REDUCTION PROGRAMME - MATERIAL SUPPLY		
Vernon's Drive Montego Bay Mains Replacement & Upgrade (2Km 400mm DI pipes) Material Supply		76,000,000.00
<i>SUB-TOTAL REGIONAL NRW REDUCTION PROGRAMME</i>		<i>76,000,000.00</i>
Rural Water Supply Limited Programme		
Canaan - Adelphi Water Supply	8,000	200,000,000.00
Sub-Total		200,000,000.00
<i>SUB-TOTAL WATER</i>	169,562	<i>5,388,027,200.00</i>
<i>SEWERAGE</i>		
Rehabilitation & Upgrading of Wastewater Treatment Plants		
Greater Portmore WwTP Rehabilitation - Phase 2		480,000,000.00
Rehabilitation & Upgrading of Wastewater Treatment Plants (NEPA Listing, K8, M5, etc.)		500,000,000.00
Harbour View WwTP Rehabilitation & Upgrading		150,000,000.00
Sub-Total		1,130,000,000.00
Kingston & St. Andrew Sewer Expansion Programme		
Mona Heights Sewerage (sewerage of roads in Mona Heights) Side Roads, etc...Geranium, Gerbera, Bergonia, Lilly Way, Anthurium, Butter Cup, Petunia, Camelia Way	10,000	160,000,000.00
University Crescent Sewer	2,000	50,000,000.00
Munroe to Wellington to Hope Road Sewer	8,000	1,000,000,000.00
Port Royal Sewerage	2,200	200,000,000.00
Land Development Sewers - Material Supply		50,000,000.00
Sub-Total		1,460,000,000.00
<i>SUB-TOTAL SEWERAGE</i>	22,200	<i>2,590,000,000.00</i>

Your government has been investing at an unprecedented rate in these systems to reverse decades of neglect.

I am happy to report that the National Water Commission, which was once considered a fiscal risk, will for the second year in a row, declare a surplus at the end of March 2024. **Madam Speaker**, this surplus should be thought of as growing water investment capacity, instead of as profit.

The sound fiscal management of the NWC, has led to several major capital investments completed over the last 24 months. These projects have improved connectivity and reliability in our water distribution network, resulting in improvements for over 350,000 Jamaicans.

For the benefit of those in this Honourable House and for those listening, the list of major projects that have been undertaken and completed and benefiting over 197,000 Jamaicans, at a cost of \$2.6 billion, include:

St. Catherine:

- Jericho pipeline at a cost of J\$75 million benefitting 3,000 people
- Hellshire Phase 3 booster station at a cost of J\$50 million benefitting 2,000
- Greater Portmore Wastewater Treatment Plant at a cost of J\$200 million benefitting 100,000 people
- The Pear Tree Grove pipeline and solar panel installation at a cost of J\$15 million benefitting 2,000 persons
- The Watermount water supply line replacement at a cost of J\$25 million benefitting 1,000 persons.

St. Elizabeth

- Hopewell to Fort Charles at a cost of J\$51 million benefitting 3,000 people
- Old Pepper bolted steel tank at a cost of J\$50 million benefitting 3,000 people

St. James

- Rhyne Park Water supply system - J\$230 million benefitting 6,000 people
- Torado Heights Storage Tank
- Cedar Hill Storage Tank

Trelawny

- Martha Brae Intake upgrade project - J\$220 million benefitting 100,000 people

Hanover

- Merlene Ottey High Pipeline – J\$100 million benefitting 3,000 people

Clarendon:

- Mineral Heights Pipeline Replacements
- Mitchell Town Pipeline Replacement

- York Town Storage Tank Replacement Project
- Portland Cottage/Rocky Point and Salt River Supply System
- Darlow Catchment Tank Rehabilitation, Clarendon, benefiting 650 persons, at a cost of \$1.25 million.
- Bunkers Hill System in Northern, Clarendon benefiting 1,000 persons at a cost of \$10 million

In the KSA area we have completed work on several capital projects including:

- Port Royal Bypass Pump Installation, as well as the relaying of the distribution main
- Hagley Park Road / Gretna Green Avenue Water & Sewerage Improvement
- Padmore and Sterling Castle Heights Pipeline Replacement Projects
- Kencot Collector Sewers
- Mona Heights/Bougainvillea Sewer Installations
- Bay Farm Collector Sewers
- Gardenia Sewers
- Montgomery Replacement Well. **Madam Speaker**, this one is major as it will provide 2 million gallons daily to the corporate area, and ultimately reduce the geographic area supplied by the Mona Reservoir.

Manchester:

- Mother Fleure water system benefiting 2,506 residents at a cost of \$15 million
- Mile Gully pipeline
- Additionally, the Greater Mandeville Water Supply Improvement Project is approximately 60% complete. This is a \$4.5 Billion investment across three budget cycles.

Last year in the midst of Jamaica's worst drought, the Corporate area under-supplied potable water by just over 12 million gallons daily. It is why **Madam Speaker**, I am happy to report to this Honourable House that we have entered the implementation phase and broken ground for the "long touted" Rio Cobre Water Treatment plant in Content, St Catherine.

When completed in two years, this plant will provide 15 1/2 million gallons daily supporting distribution in KSA, Portmore, and Spanish Town. This US\$78 million PPP will move us closer to our 2030 goals.



Madam Speaker, we will continue to make major investments in Capital works in the coming fiscal year. Over \$5 billion is expected to be spent this fiscal year benefitting more than 165,000 Jamaicans. Additionally, more than \$2.5 billion will be invested in sewage infrastructure work.

Madam Speaker, outside of this massive portfolio just outlined, let me mention a few other strategic projects:

Madam Speaker, the CDB funded projects, which have been long in coming (over 20 years in some cases). This project targets upgrading the water supply system in five parishes and has been added to the Public Sector Investment Program. This will benefit from a \$ 30 million USD loan from the CDB, with the GOJ funding \$ 6 million USD over the next 4 years. The projects include:

- Agualta Vale/Jordan Run Scheme in South Eastern, St. Mary
- Mason Hall Scheme in Western, St. Mary
- Albert Town/Ulster Spring Scheme in Southern, Trelawny
- Union/ Balaclava Scheme in North Eastern, St. Elizabeth
- Port Morant/Airy Castle Scheme in Eastern, St. Thomas
- Green Park, Higgins Town/ Bamboo Scheme in South Eastern & North Western, St. Ann

This year, the project management unit will be established and commence the project procurement phase at a cost of \$ 85 million JMD. Land Acquisition will also be covered this year.

Rock River Dam, Clarendon

Madam Speaker, the growing demand for reliable potable water in the Rock River and immediate surrounding communities, compounded by the undersized pump at the Source, the age and undersized distribution pipelines necessitates upgrading works to the source and distribution network.

This project will see the upgrading of the production capacity of the Rock River Spring, the protection and rehabilitation of the on-site facilities, and the improvement of reliable water supply to the Rock River and surrounding communities by installing new distribution pipelines to serve just over 6,000 residents. The estimated cost for this project is \$140 million JMD.

Negril Water Improvement Project

Madam Speaker, we understand the issue of water security in particular in Negril and environs. The Negril Water Improvement Project will see the construction of a **10 MIGD** Water Treatment Plant in Roaring River, Westmoreland at an estimated cost of USD \$20 million.

The overall effectiveness of this intervention must be complemented by improvement activities to those systems adjacent to the focal target area. This will ensure the sustainability of the intervention as well as, in the medium to long term, adequacy of supply to current and future demands. In light of this, the activities to be undertaken as part of this project are contiguous for an effective and lasting intervention.

Madam Speaker, energy usage in the water sector is heavy with NWC being the largest customer of the Jamaica Public Service. We have had months when the energy bill exceeded \$1 billion JMD. As such, the NWC has embarked on several projects that will reduce its energy consumption and ultimately create more fiscal space for capital investments, and keep prices to consumers stable. The projects include:

- The development of a 350kW Solar Generation Facility at the Forrest Hills Re-lift Station in KSA. Construction is to commence in July at a cost of \$ 68 million JMD.
- The development of a 350kW Solar Generation Facility at the Leader's Avenue (Terminal) Pumping Station in Montego Bay, St James. Construction is also expected to commence in July at a cost of \$68 million JMD.
- In Frazers Content in St Catherine, we will construct a 100kW Solar Generation facility at a cost of \$55 Million JMD. This project will commence construction in August of this year.
- The major energy project for the NWC is a \$ 62 million USD PPP for the installation of a 45mW floating Solar Generation Facility at the Mona Reservoir. Having received Cabinet Approval in November 2022 the pilot phase is now complete. As such we will enter the implementation phase THIS year. This will deliver in excess of \$1 Billion JMD in value to the NWC once the project is complete.

Madam Speaker we cannot stop there with reducing the energy costs of the NWC.

I have further directed that four Renewable energy projects be developed to achieve this at the following Water Treatment Plants:

- Constant Spring
- Martha Brae
- Great River
- Log Wood

Madam Speaker, these projects will have a major impact. They will go to tender in July of this year and will be implemented at a cost of \$1 billion JMD over two budget cycles. We expect implementation to be complete in late 2026.

Members of this house and Jamaicans listening should also know that their government recognizes the urgent need for upgrades to minor water systems and will invest over \$409million JMD into the following systems nationally:

Proposed Projects FY 2024-25			
Project Name	Parish	Population	Cost (\$J)
**Riversdale	Northeastern, St. Catherine		\$53,200,000.00
Spring Gardens	Southern, St. James		\$19,000,000.00
**Maroon Town	Southern, St. James		\$53,200,000.00
**Stepney	Southwestern, St. Ann		\$45,600,000.00
Rocky Point unplan settlement	Southeastern, Clarendon		\$22,800,000.00
Petersfield	Western, St. Mary		\$11,400,000.00
Fallen Spring/Bruk Way	Western, St. Mary		\$7,600,000.00
Bamboo	Eastern, Hanover		\$30,400,000.00
**Orange Bay/Crystal Spring	Western, Portland		\$60,800,000.00
Cascade Section	Western, Portland		\$19,000,000.00
Non-Such	Eastern, Portland		\$26,600,000.00
Lowe River/Mendez Town	Southern, Trelawny		\$20,370,000.00
Purchasing of pipes to assist NWC			\$40,000,000.00
Total			\$409,970,000.00

Madam Speaker, having gone around the country into the rural areas, I have heard the cries loud and clear from persons who complained bitterly about not having water. To be clear, many of these persons were not NWC customers, they lived far from any water utility system. They rely on natural sources, springs and rivers or local supply systems such as catchment tanks or entombments.

I want to announce an additional JA\$1 billion allocation to be dedicated to rural water systems.

Madam Speaker, coming out of Jamaica's worst drought last year, we designed a household water storage plan.

This was underpinned by the tabling of the ***Rainwater Harvesting Guidelines*** for planning authorities in this house. This pilot project has also benefited from the financial contributions of the IDB. This project targets the 14 worst-affected constituencies from last year's drought. It seeks to install 3000 rainwater harvesting systems in the targeted constituencies. So far, we have completed the distribution of one thousand 400-gallon tanks and expect the completion of the Pilot project in May. Colleagues should recall my commitment to distribute 50,000 water tanks. This distribution will commence on completion of the IDB pilot project, and over 10,000 water tanks will be distributed this fiscal year. We have budgeted \$250 million JMD to facilitate the purchase and distribution of these tanks and further updates will be provided.

I want to assure Jamaicans, that we are far advanced in developing other Critical National projects. These projects include, but are not limited to:

- The replacement of critical supply mains in Western Jamaica, including the mains from the Martha Brae into St James, and the Negril supply lines at a cost of \$70 million USD. This project is expected to commence later this year and will take 24 months.
- The re-development of the Hermitage Dam: The Hermitage Dam is 95 years old, and was built with service guarantees of 50 years. As such we are in the project design phase for the replacement of the Dam Wall and the increase in the capacity of the Dam.
- Similarly the Mona Reservoir was built for a much smaller population and as such, we are planning for its expansion.
- The completion of the project assessment phases for the development of the Mahogany Vale system (which includes the repair of the Yallahs pipeline and Expansion of the Mona Reservoir) and the land use studies.
- Finally, the assessment phase of the use of deep sea desalination in Jamaica is expected to be completed this year.

The nation will be kept abreast of advances on these critical national projects.

Irrigation

Madam Speaker, for decades the farmers of our country have asked that access to water be prioritized by successive Governments. Many Governments have promised to do this, but it is this Government that is getting it done. This is extremely important with the new climate realities.

Essex Valley

Already, in parts of South Manchester and South St. Elizabeth, we have drilled eight wells, five of which produce water. A cadastral survey of the area has been undertaken, and a socio-economic baseline survey has been completed.

Madam Speaker, your government has also conducted a climate vulnerability assessment, energy audits, global CAP assessment, and trained hundreds of farmers.

Madam Speaker, this year, we are spending \$1.9 billion JMD to complete the installation of irrigation pipes, fittings, and meters, supply and install a renewable energy plant to power the irrigation system, and construct storage and distribution facilities. In addition, as a part of the project, our Farmers in Essex Valley will benefit from 27 kilometers of Farm Road being rehabilitated!

Southern Plains Irrigation Scheme

In Parnassus, Clarendon, and both Amity Hall and Bridge Pen in St Catherine, we are investing over \$1.5 billion to provide access to irrigation water on fallow sugar lands to increase agricultural productivity.

This includes the construction of wells and canal networks and the development of the associated agricultural infrastructure. Three wells have already been drilled.

Pedro Plains Irrigation Project

Madam Speaker, last year I announced that after five decades of announcements, the Pedro Plains Irrigation Scheme would finally become a reality. We have committed to its designation as a National Strategic Project.

This life-changing initiative will use water from the Black River to irrigate the plains and farmlands in the parish. Thousands of farmers across communities such as Flagaman, Greenfield, Barbary Hall, Southfield, and Top Hill will benefit from the project.

Madam Speaker, we have entered the implementation phase. Cadastral mapping of all the parcels of land to be impacted by the distribution network is underway.

A direct result of this work is that over 1,000 titles will be produced THIS YEAR under the project. A socio-economic baseline farmer survey and GPS farm tagging are also underway. This financial year, we will break ground for the commencement of the civil work.

Madam Speaker, though it is indisputable that no other Government has done more to reduce water scarcity, improve resilience and widen connectivity, I wish to assure Jamaicans that we are cognizant of the impact on your lives, and will re-double our efforts to make Jamaica water resilient.

Housing

Madam Speaker, we have an ambitious, long-term plan to provide housing for all our people by looking closely at the various areas of need and ways in which we can provide solutions.

Let me remind this Honourable House of the different agencies through which the Government is working to provide affordable housing solutions for our people.

The New Social Housing Programme, Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation:

This Programme was developed to improve the housing condition of the country's poorest and most disadvantaged population (those in dire circumstances) by providing quality, affordable and sustainable housing.

Implementation modalities are:

- (1) indigent housing across all 63 constituencies
- (2) relocation of vulnerable communities, and;
- (3) upgrading of tenement yards – one per constituency up to a maximum of 30 units per upgrade.

As at March 5, 2024, 213 housing units benefitting almost 800 individuals across 55 constituencies have been completed and currently, there are 51 active construction sites across 25 constituencies.

In addition, the Tourism Enhancement Fund will under a partnership with the New Social Housing Programme provide \$500 million to fund housing for tourism workers who live in substandard conditions.

The Housing Agency of Jamaica (HAJ)

Madam Speaker, the HAJ continues to provide affordable housing solutions for low and middle-income earning Jamaicans as well as provide for the regularization of informal settlements. Of the 14,000 housing solutions the HAJ has committed to start, I am pleased to

announce that approximately 4,000 have been achieved. Over the next four (4) years, the HAJ is projecting approximately 10,000 housing starts and just over 6,000 deliveries. In 2024/2025, construction will commence at:

- Bay Farm Road, St. Andrew – 72 solutions (in partnership with the NHT)
- Clarks Town, Trelawny - 721 solutions
- Luana Gardens 4, St. Elizabeth - 587 solutions
- Oasis at Montego Bay – 96 solutions, and
- Grange Pen, St. James – 1,250 solutions (through a Joint Venture).

Madam Speaker, these five developments account for 2,726 solutions to address the needs in the low to middle income market.

Land Titling/Community Upgrade

Madam Speaker, the HAJ has been on a path to transform brownfield sites by undertaking infrastructural work in concert with key stakeholders such as the Tourism Enhancement Fund (TEF).

During the 2023/24, the HAJ continued work in the Grange Pen Brownfield Development geared towards bringing water, sewage and infrastructure to households and providing 314 Certificates of Title. **Madam Speaker**, this will enable residents within the community to know what it means to finally have security of tenure. Additional brownfield projects to be undertaken in 2024/25 include:

- Retirement, St. James – 1,547 solutions
- Eden Park, St. James – 144 solutions
- Norwich, Portland – 423 solutions.

Madam Speaker, security of tenure for citizens of brownfield sites is of paramount importance to me and many members of this Honourable House. Over the four-year period, the HAJ will be intensifying title issuance, and the projection is 2,050 titles.

St. Paul's Lane Development

Madam Speaker, in my presentation last year, I introduced the development of the St. Paul's Lane project in St. Andrew, comprising 24 units to benefit families whose lives and livelihoods were devastated by fire. You will recall that I mentioned that this project is being done as a pilot given the various dynamics involved and the extent to which informal settlement is prevalent in Jamaica. Today, I am pleased to report that this project has been extended from 24 to 36 units and is 90 per cent completed. **Madam Speaker**, in short order, the lives of 36 families will be improved but the impact of the initiative will be even greater for the community.

Social Programme for Select Communities

Madam Speaker, having proven the concept, we will now be looking at replicating this project across 20 communities in the coming year. \$15 billion will be earmarked over the next three years to enhance communities with limited infrastructure. Over time, a schedule of communities will be shared so that we will have a roadmap of how we will transform our communities.

Multi-Agency Working Group

Madam Speaker, land availability and cost are common constraints in many communities. When quality sites are available for development (e.g., suitable locations, served by infrastructure, proper zoning, etc.), they often come with a steep price tag that precludes building housing affordable for middle-income households or even at any other price point.

One of the most effective things that governments can do and that we are currently doing is examining our publicly owned lands. Very often government agencies find that vacant, underutilized, surplus, and otherwise non-essential properties can be made available for housing development. Consolidating multiple government buildings or relocating as practical can also free up land for housing.

A multi-agency working group led by the Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation and including the Ministry of Agriculture, NEPA and NLA has been established with the primary goal of addressing the housing issues affecting many Jamaicans. Progress has been made in identifying parcels across the country that may be suitable for housing solutions. The Working Group will shortly provide a definitive report on these available lands so that the next steps to develop housing solutions may be undertaken. Criteria for commencement of housing development will include location of supporting water and sewer infrastructure.

Update on the Greater Bernard Lodge Development

Madam Speaker, another vehicle through which we are providing housing solutions is within structured master plan development areas. Work continues on the implementation of the Greater Bernard Lodge Development Master Plan (GBLD).

The House will recall that the Plan includes areas zoned for agriculture, commerce/light industry and for residential development, with an urban town centre, all to be supported by critical social services.

The construction of the water and sewerage works is well advanced and is expected to be substantially complete by calendar year-end.

Already, two housing schemes under construction have been connected to the potable water and sewerage systems.

Construction of the 5 Km Highway, traversing the development area, is underway, excavation having been completed and with the base course now being laid.

In recognition of the increased traffic flows that will be generated by the new development, the Government declared Municipal Boulevard and Grange Lane to be Main Roads, as a prelude to the improvement and dualization of both corridors.

Madam Speaker, there has been significant investor interest in the lands that have been offered for sale with a number of the major players in the construction industry, having already taken up much of the lands. It is expected that all of the development lands would have been successfully disposed of by calendar year-end.

I am pleased to report to the House that three of the several developers, that have bought residential lands, have already completed the construction of hundreds of housing units, all of which when offered on the market, have been oversubscribed.

I am also pleased to advise the House that the Government has taken the decision to subsidize 100+ acres of land in the Development for the National Housing Trust and Housing Agency of Jamaica, in order to make the units to be built more affordable.

Madam Speaker, in order to support the new communities, lands have been reserved for a STEM School, a police post, a hospital and a fire station. The contracts for the transfer of these lands are now being negotiated with the relevant Ministries.

Madam Speaker, the Development is also catalysing private sector investment. A state-of-the-art mixed use commercial complex is being developed by the Sagicor Group, on some 30 acres of land in the GBLD at a cost of approximately J\$9 billion.

Madam Speaker planned, structured developments like Bernard Lodge enhance the quality of life of our citizens.

The National Housing Trust (NHT)

Housing Starts

Madam Speaker, the NHT continues to find innovative ways to increase access and affordability of housing for contributors.

In 2024/25, the NHT is projecting to commence construction of 15,009 housing solutions with more than 96% geared toward lower middle income to low income contributors. These comprise 4,309 two-bedroom solutions, priced at an average below \$13 million; 7,600 one-bedroom units, priced at an average below \$10 million and 3,100 serviced lots, priced below \$4 million.



2024/2025 Programmed Housing Starts by Parish and Project

Parish	Project(s)	Total Starts
Kingston & St. Andrew	JDF Housing, Rasta City (now Royal Estates), Bay Farm Road	966
St. Andrew	Ruthven 2	400
St. Catherine	Brampton Farms, Colbeck 5&6	2,842
Clarendon	Longville Park Pen, Carlsberg	2,277
Manchester	Mount Nelson	1,468
St. Elizabeth	Friendship 2, Brompton Manor 2	543
Westmoreland	Negril Spot, Chantilly	1,175
Hanover	Pointe	365
Trelawny	Dry Valley	1,040
St. James	Barrett Hall, Spot Valley	1,983
St. Mary	Galina, Highgate, Industry Pen	580
St. Thomas	Rozelle	660
All Parishes	Build on Own Land, Construction Loan and Home Owners Projects	710
Total Housing Starts		15,009

Housing Completions

Madam Speaker, the NHT will complete approximately 3,744 housing solutions across the island in 2024/2025 as shown in the table below:

2024/2025 Programmed Housing Completions by Parish and Project

Parish	Project(s)	Total Completions
Kingston	Vineyard Town, Maxfield Park, St. Paul's lane	32
St. Andrew	Foreshore	46
St. Catherine	Silver Sun, Colbeck	1,105
Clarendon	Humming Bird Meadows, Monymusk 2	333
Manchester	Perth 2	492
St. Elizabeth	Brompton Manor 2, Malvern	130
Westmoreland	Sheffield Palms	60
Hanover	Winchester	120
Trelawny	Windsor	118
St. James	Irwin, Estuary 2	524
St. Mary	Nonsuch	14
St. Thomas	Rozelle	100
All Parishes	Build on Own Land, Construction Loan and Home Owners Projects	670
Total Housing Completions		3,744

Housing completions continue to be challenged by supply chain disruptions, contractor delays, quality assurance issues and approval delays. Another significant challenge that has emerged is that developers are struggling to secure skilled labour.

Therefore, in addition to the initiatives I mentioned under HEART, the NHT will provide the opportunity for their HOPE participants to develop their skills and experience and become certified in construction. The NHT will build out this programme with the HEART/NSTA Trust by creating an on-the-job training environment with development partners and aid in the provision of safety equipment, small tools and other learning aids. Participants will be paid a stipend at a special HOPE workers rate and the apprenticeship period will be extended from one to two years. Successful participants will be awarded the equivalent of two years' points towards accessing their NHT benefit.

As another boost for the labour supply of the construction sector, the NHT will also expand its scholarship programme to provide tuition at a maximum of \$1 million per annum per student for up to ten (10) students at the tertiary level pursuing careers in Civil Engineering, Construction Management, Construction Technology, Architecture, Urban Planning, Building Technology and related fields.

Expanded Scheme Upgrade Programme

Madam Speaker, since the 2019 announcement of the Scheme Upgrade Programme for the improvement of the physical and social infrastructure in housing schemes developed by the NHT in its first 10 years of existence, the Trust has expanded the programme to include Government-built housing developments and schemes built after the first ten years on a needs basis. Additionally, the inadequacy of important social infrastructure such as early childhood facilities and health centers has been highlighted and will be considered for support as appropriate. The funding available for the programme was \$4 billion. In 2023, a further \$2 billion was committed to the programme. To date, projects have been identified and the scope of works agreed with relevant stakeholders for 99 communities.

The table below provides details of the 15 communities with the highest budgetary expenditure to date:

Top 15 Communities Rehabilitated by Expenditure to date, Parish and Status

Location	Parish	Scope of Works	Budget (\$M)	Outlay to date (\$M)	Status
Grants Housing Scheme	Pen St. Andrew	The Upgrades to the apartment building already completed. Rehabilitation of Sewer System is Phase 2	80.0	60.3	Ph 2 In planning.
Charlemont Housing Scheme	St. Catherine	Rehabilitation of roads and drains	60.0	60.0	Practical completion
Arcadia/Gayle Housing Scheme	St. Mary	Rehabilitation of roads and drains	60.0	57.0	Completed
Cooreville Gardens Phase I	St. Andrew	Road Rehabilitation & Drains	56.2	56.2	Practical completion
Frontier	St. Mary	Rehabilitation of roads and drains	55.8	55.8	Completed
Bushy Park Housing Scheme	Clarendon	Rehabilitation of roads and drains	54.2	54.2	Completed
Portsmouth Housing Scheme	St. Catherine	Rehabilitation of roads and drains	60.0	52.8	Practical completion
Irboreale	St. Mary	Rehabilitation of roads and drains	51.7	51.7	Completed
Holruth Court	St. Andrew	Roof repair, painting of external walls	60	51.2	Practical completion

		and repair roadway and drain			
Bellevue Heights	St. Catherine	Rehabilitation of roads and drains	51.1	51.1	Completed
Hague Housing Scheme	Trelawny	Rehabilitation of roads and drains	60	50.2	Completed
Cooreville Gardens Phase II	St. Andrew	Road Rehabilitation & Drains	60.0	50.2	Practical completion
Preddie Housing Scheme	Clarendon	Rehabilitation of roads and drains	49.6	49.6	Completed
Seville Housing Scheme	St. Ann	Rehabilitation of roads and drains	49.6	49.6	Completed
Culloden Housing Scheme	Westmoreland	Rehabilitation of roads & drains	49.5	49.5	Completed

Police Station Rehabilitation Programme

Madam Speaker, in 2019 a programme was introduced to rehabilitate identified police stations within a 10-mile radius of NHT schemes with the ultimate aim of improving security. A total of eleven police stations have been identified for rehabilitation thus far, of which five (5) have been completed. To date, \$835 million of the \$2 billion allocated has been spent.

Housing for the Homeless and Housing Insecure

Madam Speaker, through the NHT's work with the upgrading of infirmaries, it has identified the need for more supporting shelter services for the vulnerable in Jamaica.

The NHT will, in partnership with the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development (MLGCD) construct fourteen (14) homeless shelters on government lands across the island. These shelters will vary in size and design based on need assessments carried out by social workers and housing specialists to properly address the unique needs of the homeless as well as genuine social cases identified by the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

Madam Speaker, we also recognize that our wards of the state on attaining age 18 need assistance with accommodation over a two to three year period while mentoring continues for them to achieve personal and career goals to lead independent lives. An assessment will therefore be done to determine the need in particular parishes and NHT will look at provision of appropriate housing solutions.

Expansion of the 10 Plus Home Improvement Loan

Madam Speaker, currently public sector workers enjoy a special benefit which allows for access to a home improvement loan from the NHT 10 years after the initial mortgage loan. For non-public sector worker contributors the time to access the loan is 15 years. As more Jamaicans become homeowners, there has been an increased demand for home-improvement financing. As a result, effective July 1, 2024, the NHT will revise its Home Improvement Loan policy to allow **ALL** contributors to access home improvement loans of up to \$3.5 million after 10 years.

Green Energy Loan

Madam Speaker, the NHT is developing a New Green Energy Initiative to be responsive to the climate change impacting dwellings. This new policy will have direct impact on NHT's design of new structures—which will be optimized for natural cooling and cross-ventilation, rainwater harvesting and solar energy.

As of July 1, 2024, NHT contributors will now be able to access a new loan product—the Smart Energy Home Improvement Loan—to outfit their dwellings with any combination of: solar panels and batteries, solar water heaters, solar insulation, other renewable energy technology (windmills, hydropower, and biomass), rain water harvesting and storage (to include water tanks and pumps). The assets must have a useful life that meets or exceeds the loan term. Contributors may access up to \$1.5 million (two contributors being able to join and access \$1.5 million each) for green energy home improvement at a rate of 5% with a payback period of up to ten years.

Solar Panel Home Grant

Madam Speaker, in the coming year, 2024/2025, the NHT will expand its Home Grants to include the installation of solar panel systems on the houses of Public Sector pensioners, at a maximum of \$1.5M each.

The programme will target 30 of these pensioners per parish each year, for the next three years. Beneficiaries will be selected at random (after being stratified by parish) and after satisfaction of the following criteria:

- At the point of retirement, the pensioner was earning less than \$30,000 per week at that time.



- Must be a homeowner (this includes owners of non-NHT constructed houses).
- Must be 60 years or older.
- Must not have already installed these systems.

Preference will be given to pensioners who live in areas with unreliable/irregular electricity supply. This grant will enable them to reduce their utility bill and reduce environmental impact.

Revised First Step Housing Programme

Madam Speaker, the NHT will develop one-bedroom apartment complexes, particularly within or near urban centers, as starter homes. These apartments will be made available to contributors via sale agreements with an optional buy-back clause.

The buy-back clause will give mortgagors the option to sell the property back to the NHT after a determined time. The Trust may re-purchase the unit for sale to its contributors. The mortgagors who sell their unit to the NHT under this arrangement will be allowed to access a new benefit from the NHT, in full, towards the acquisition of a new home.

This model will be an attractive dwelling arrangement for single dwellers and young couples who do not wish to forfeit an NHT first-time homeowners' benefit in order to secure stable housing.

Units that are currently under construction at Vineyard Town and Howard Avenue, St. Andrew (264 one-bedroom units) will be sold under this programme. An additional 303 units at Barracks Road in Montego Bay, are also earmarked, and will be targeted to workers in the Tourism, BPO and security sectors.

Revitalised Urban Renewal Programme

Madam Speaker, the programme model and types of solutions under the NHT's Urban Renewal programme have evolved from its predecessor, the Inner City Housing Programme. The Trust is now producing mainly low-rise single and multi-family units with open space, a design change that has addressed some of the issues identified with previous programmes.

Madam Speaker, the NHT is now in a position to increase the output of low-income solutions under the Urban Renewal programme and will commit an initial \$9 billion in 2024/2025, with additional annual allocations going forward. The programme will be rolled out beyond Kingston and St. Andrew, with areas such as Russia and Grange Hill, Westmoreland; May Pen, Clarendon; Norwood/Glendevon and Flankers, St. James; and parts of Spanish Town, St. Catherine under consideration. Areas within the Corporate Area under consideration include the Barbican Road/Liguanea Area, Cassia Park, Cassava Piece and areas of Red Hills Road.

Expanded Institution Housing Finance Programme

Madam Speaker, in recognition of the housing needs of various workers, and to support national efforts to attract and retain talent in strategic fields, the NHT will develop housing targeted to workers in the strategic Health, Security, Education and Tourism sectors.

Where employers (companies) in these sectors own lands in close proximity to their places of employment, the NHT will partner with them to construct housing.

The NHT will also reserve units in select housing developments, for sale or lease, directly to these companies, who will then make them available to their employees.

Policy Change to Benefit Young Adults

Madam Speaker, based on the NHT's beneficiary selection system, the longer you contribute, the greater your chance of selection for a scheme unit. Consequently, older contributors are the ones mainly selected for NHT scheme units.

The Trust is cognizant of some of the indirect consequences of this policy, and its direct impact on specific groups—particular contributors below the age of 35. The Trust's data suggests that this group is underrepresented in scheme selections, even when factoring for other affordability and accessibility levers such as Intergenerational and Parent Assist mortgages, which take into account the points of the older applicant.

To address this, the NHT will reserve up to 10% of the housing solutions in the current Housing Plan for under 35 years old contributors. Over the next 5 years, this will result in approximately 4,300 housing solutions being available at 100% financing up to \$15M, subject to affordability levels.

Madam Speaker, this policy represents another wealth creation initiative of the Government targeted towards youth.

Contribution Amnesty for MSMEs and Charities

Madam Speaker, the NHT is mindful of the difficulties that Micro, Small and Medium sized Enterprises (MSMEs) and Charitable entities have faced in recent times, particularly with adverse effects of the pandemic. To support the recovery of these entities and encourage their regularization during the coming year, the NHT will offer relief from interest and penalties on outstanding Contributions.

As at December 31, 2023, a total of \$6.78 billion in contributions and interest was outstanding from these institutions with charitable organizations accounting for \$129 million.

In respect of charitable institutions and MSMEs with 50 or fewer employees and annual revenue of less than \$425 million, the NHT will offer a Contribution Amnesty as follows:

1. **For all Contributions settled by September 30, 2024** – the NHT will waive all penalty interest on employee and employer contributions, as well as offer a 20% discount on outstanding employer contributions sums;
2. **For all Contributions settled between October 1 and December 31, 2024** – the NHT will waive all penalty interest on employee and employer contributions; and
3. **For all Contributions settled between January and March 2025** – the NHT will waive penalty interest on employer contributions only.

Port Authority of Jamaica

Redevelopment of Port Towns

Madam Speaker, the Port Authority has been engaged in a process of redevelopment of our port towns.

Falmouth

Falmouth, for example, has significant heritage and historical value, which, if properly preserved and utilised, could see the significant expansion of the town as a tourism, cultural and lifestyle centre. **Madam Speaker**, this process is underway. The old Hampden Wharf has been developed into a new Artisan Village adjacent to the cruise terminal with the Port Authority donating the land and being responsible for the build, and the Tourism Enhancement Fund responsible for outfitting the facility. **Madam Speaker**, the establishment of Jamaica's inaugural artisan village marks a significant step towards revitalizing and showcasing local craftsmanship on an international platform. The Village is poised to attract a diverse array of tourists, offering them a unique glimpse into Jamaica's rich cultural heritage and artisanal talents.

Madam Speaker, the PAJ has developed a Master Plan for a new “township” on 50 acres of land in immediate proximity to the cruise terminal. The Master Plan will accommodate civic facilities, commercial and employment-creating activities, housing, promenades, parks, and other public areas in an environmentally friendly, pleasant, safe and easily accessible new township.

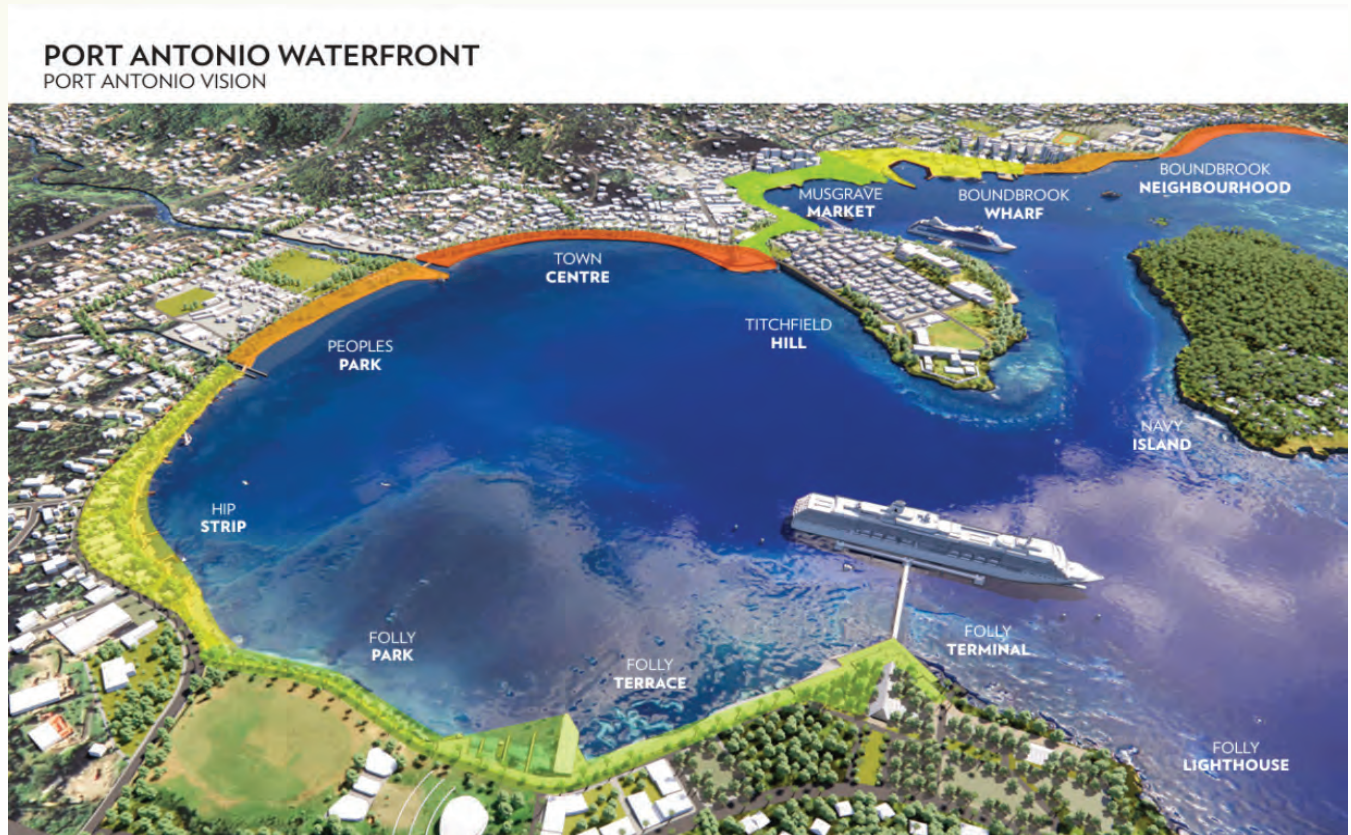
The plan provides for public car parking facilities along with Park and Ride solutions that connect the development, the Port, the Old Town, and the New Market. Mitigation measures to reduce the environmental risks associated with coastal storm surge and flooding from the Martha Brae River are integral to the plan. Green energy solutions will also be emphasized throughout the township.

Madam Speaker, the initial programme of work was interrupted by the COVID pandemic and other pressing priorities, but this ambitious project is again on track and will be implemented using a public private partnership model.



Port Antonio

In my presentation last year, I indicated that the Port Authority had engaged international consultants to develop a Master Plan consistent with the Vision of a High Value, Low Density tourism destination that will preserve the unique history and character of Port Antonio as the birthplace of Caribbean tourism. The Master Plan has now been prepared in collaboration with town residents and leaders, elected officials, and government agencies. A high level image of the Master Plan is now being displayed on the screen.



Key components of this Master Plan include:

- A cruise ship terminal in the East Harbour along with high end hotels and villas on the Folly Lands
- Enhancement of the lands currently used for cricket into a multi-purpose sports and entertainment amphitheatre
- A new pedestrian promenade along the shoreline that connects the East and West Harbours
- A new public park similar to the Harmony Beach Park along the waterfront

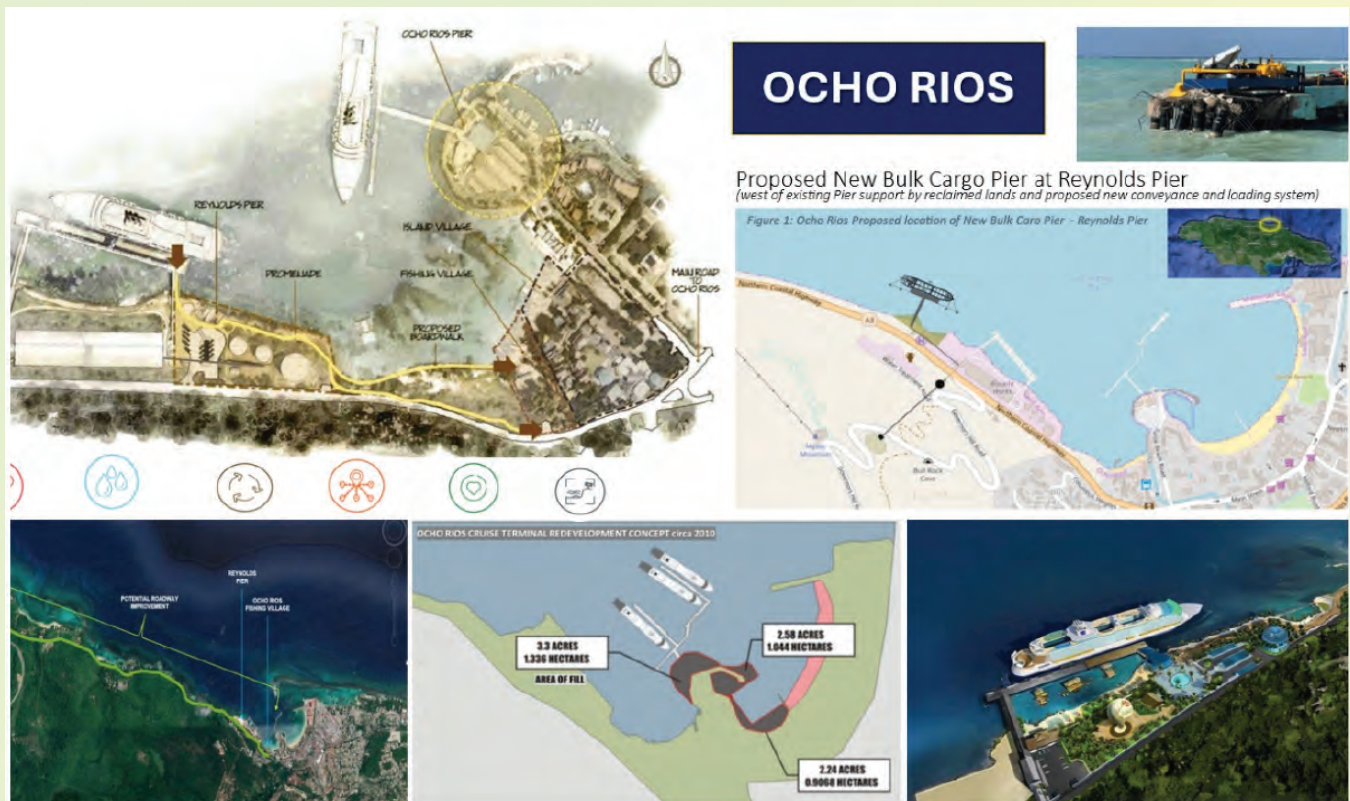
The Master Plan also incorporates the Boundbrook Urban Centre Project being undertaken by the Factories Corporation of Jamaica.

Ocho Rios

Madam Speaker, I noted earlier that the severe and unusual weather event that Jamaica experienced during the first week of February 2024 was a stark reminder that we are already experiencing the effects of Climate Change. This weather event resulted in a Cruise Ship being pinned against the main berth of the Ocho Rios Terminal leading to significant damage to the structure of the berth which will make it incapable of accepting cruise ships prior to the next cruise season at the earliest. Every effort is being made to retain as many of the scheduled cruise calls as possible in Ocho Rios given the many persons dependent on the cruise business. Vessels previously booked for berthing at the main terminal have been rescheduled to the Reynolds terminal where feasible, or to Falmouth and Montego Bay.

Options are also being reviewed for alternative berthing configurations at the Reynolds pier which might allow for even larger vessels than at present to be accommodated.

The Government is using this opportunity to assess options for repair of the terminal and simultaneously examine the potential of rebuilding the berth to accommodate the largest classes of vessels currently being built. As I described earlier, we are also undertaking a broader review of the road network in and around Ocho Rios to ease congestion and facilitate growth of the town.



Montego Freeport

Madam Speaker, the Port Authority is also spearheading the development of a Master Plan for the Montego Freeport peninsula. This includes:

- Redevelopment of the Anthony Hart Boulevard to enhance functionality and reduce traffic congestion. Design features being considered include traffic lane expansion, turn lanes, pedestrian walkways, bicycle lanes and landscaping; and
- Development of a 12-acre, mixed-use commercial complex with office, retail, food, business processing, and cargo logistics.



Port Expansion and Near Port Logistics

Madam Speaker, cargo volumes continue to increase at the Port of Kingston. Kingston Freeport Terminal Limited, the concession operator of the port, is therefore seeking additional lands to accommodate an expansion of the storage area to reduce congestion on the terminal. Negotiations are continuing between KFTL and the Port Authority to lease sections of the West Lands (between the Port and the Portmore Causeway).

Madam Speaker, the development of the Caymanas Special Economic Zone is underway with the issuance of contracts for the engineering works associated with the final design and development drawings. The strategy being pursued by the Government is to catalyse the project by undertaking the infrastructure works as well as building out 60-90 acres of the overall

650 acres. One or more master developers from the private sector will then be invited to undertake the rest of the development.



Madam Speaker, last year I had announced plans for the transfer of operations of the Tinson Pen Aerodrome to the Norman Manley International Airport and the realignment of Marcus Garvey Drive to run behind the Tinson Pen Lands releasing approximately 100 acres of land to be seamlessly incorporated into the curtilage of the port and be used for near-port logistics operations.

The Airports Authority is in discussions with the Concession Operator of the NMIA on expansion plans including hangars for storage of private planes to facilitate the relocation of operations from Tinson Pen to NMIA. The National Works Agency is also undertaking detailed planning of the realignment of Marcus Garvey Drive.

Madam Speaker, when the development is complete, we will have a larger, modern and highly secure Port of Kingston with the existing Marcus Garvey alignment being an internal road within the port. The development will be done in collaboration with Kingston Wharves Limited, the Shipping Association of Jamaica and other stakeholders in New Port West.

Monetization of Business Process Outsourcing Facilities

Madam Speaker, to finance investments in Logistics, the Port Authority is preparing to bring its Real Estate assets focused on Business Process Outsourcing to market. Legal, financial advisory and brokerage services for the transaction have been or are currently being procured.

In accordance with the Government's policy of enabling ordinary Jamaicans to own equity in wealth creating national assets, the transaction will include a public offering of shares on the Jamaica Stock Exchange.



Fishing Villages

Madam Speaker, I have tasked the Port Authority with the development of rural fishing villages in the South of the island into a modern, efficient, sustainable environment for the fisherfolk and their customers. These villages will create modern amenities for the fisherfolk and attractive, hygienic, secure facilities for their customers. Modelled loosely on the Ocho Rios Fishing Village developed earlier by the Port Authority, the locations initially being considered are Whitehouse in Westmoreland, Lucea in Hanover and the Negril fishing village.

Factories Corporation of Jamaica

New Town Centres

Madam Speaker, the disinvestment and disorder in our towns is giving way to planned, orderly development.

Construction on the Morant Bay Urban Centre is scheduled for completion by December 2024. This 436,000 sq. ft. will house the St Thomas Municipal Corporation, the St Thomas Parish Court, the HEART NSTA Trust, and other government entities located in Morant Bay. Private sector entities will include the National Commercial Bank, the University of the Commonwealth Caribbean (UCC), and a prominent Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) company, and the first

KFC location for St. Thomas. Negotiations are also underway for a gas station as well as the first electric charging station in the parish to be at the new Urban Centre.

Madam Speaker, the Centre will also include kiosks to facilitate micro businesses and indigenous entrepreneurs for everyday conveniences, for example, for shoe repair, dress making, and juice bars. Between three to five thousand persons are expected to gain employment at the urban centre.

Madam Speaker, I had announced last year that the Government will memorialise the historical significance of the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865 by establishing a Museum that tells the story of the momentous event that changed Jamaica. Since the initiation of the project, a project advisory committee has been established comprising representatives of the CHASE Fund, the Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport as well as the Jamaica National Heritage Trust (JNHT) and the Institute of Jamaica. A site has been identified for the museum, at the old Morant Bay Courthouse, which was the scene of the rebellion. The site is owned by the St. Thomas Municipal Corporation, and is a declared historic site.

The process of engaging consultants has also begun to refine the story that the museum should communicate. The architectural and structural drawings, and bills of quantities, are under development and are expected to be completed within the second quarter of the upcoming financial year.

Madam Speaker, the Boundbrook Urban Centre in Port Antonio is set to create over 140,000 sq. ft. of modern space to be developed in keeping with the vision under the Port Antonio Master Plan. Groundbreaking for this development is scheduled for next month.

Madam Speaker, these are just two of many to come. Several other townships will be the beneficiaries of newly built, modern facilities as part of our thrust to building stronger, more resilient and future-focused town centre developments.

Micro Business Community Parks

Madam Speaker, in addition to the Urban Town Centres, there is a critical need for properly designed micro commercial centres in rural communities to facilitate micro enterprises. As part of their inclusive thrust the FCJ is examining the incorporation of Community Micro Business Parks which will be designed as turnkey facilities for the following types of businesses:

- Hair braiding, salon, and barber shops
- Shoe repair
- Wholesale and fresh produce shops
- Variety retail stores
- After school tutoring classes
- Dress making

- Tuck shop
- Phone and small electronics repair

When I say turnkey, I mean that the shops will have the basic equipment and furniture necessary to enable the young business entrepreneur to immediately start their business. **Madam Speaker**, I know of the challenges that many start up businesses are having in getting funds to buy equipment and furniture to get their businesses going. The FCJ will equip these shops with the basic requirements and build the cost into the rental charges including lease purchase options. FCJ will also give a one-year moratorium to all start up businesses. In addition, each shop owner will be trained by the JBDC in how to manage a proper business.

Garmex Freezone Redevelopment and Expansion

Madam Speaker, over \$3.5 to \$Z4 billion will be spent within three years on Phases 2 & 3 of the Garmex Expansion Project. This will result in over 250,000 sq. ft. of new, diversified solutions for not only manufacturing entities, but most notably, wide-ranging commercial solutions to include professional suites, spaces suitable for BPO enterprises and fast-food establishments. Upon completion, the Garmex Freezone Complex will be the largest industrial and commercial complex in the Caribbean with approximately one million square feet of space, including designated for small and medium-sized businesses.

Naggo Head Integrated Business Centre

Madam Speaker, following Cabinet approval of the Joint Venture Agreement for the Naggo Head Integrated Business Centre development, financing negotiations are ongoing with prospective local and international partners. The development is geared at not only offering space solutions for companies in the global services and commercial sectors but also advanced skills training and educational solutions to meet the needs of the people of Portmore.

This Silicon Valley-type concept, at a planned footprint of over 1 million square feet of space and employing over 10,000 people, will be a significant game-changer – forging a “knowledge nucleus” for the residents of Portmore.

UDC

Madam Speaker, the Urban Development Corporation (UDC) has developed a multi-billion-dollar Strategic Programme of activities for the financial year ending March 31, 2025, in keeping with its mandate of making development happen to improve the quality of life of the Jamaican people.



Downtown Kingston and the Government Campus

Madam Speaker, there are several assessments being undertaken to inform the planning of the redevelopment of Kingston and in particular communities near Heroes' Circle continue to be a major focus. These studies will be completed in this fiscal year. The National Water Commission (NWC) and the National Works Agency (NWA) are completing designs for the well-needed infrastructure works to improve water supply and the sewerage network.

This improved infrastructure will support the phasing of the larger plans to include the new Houses of Parliament and the Government Campus as well as new housing developments and social amenities across the communities.

Other important parts of the roll out of the development include construction of a new parking facility for the Ministry of Finance and the Public Service with a capacity to house approximately 390 vehicles, that will remove the need for parking within the National Heroes' Park and clear the way for its further development. Designs are near complete and procurement will get underway for the parking garage later this year.

Another important component is the J\$4 billion redevelopment of the York Park Fire Station into a modern emergency response facility, one better equipped to meet the critical emergencies needs of Central, Downtown and the wider Kingston. Upon completion, the facility will see improved working conditions and equipment for over 300 fire fighters and emergency medical response.

The project is at the design stage with tender for works - projected for October 2024 and tender for equipping and outfitting slated for January 2025.

Townships and Urban Centres

The proper planning of our towns and urban spaces are a priority. Our towns have historically evolved organically over time and the result of this has not been ideal. It is only fitting therefore that, as we continue this period of significant infrastructure development as a country, deliberate planning to enhance our urban centres and townships become a priority. The UDC will therefore focus on the planning and build out of a few key areas, namely Caymanas, St. Catherine, Lucea in Hanover, and Font Hill in St. Elizabeth.

Caymanas

The UDC has stewardship of more than 10,000 acres of land in Caymanas. The development and build out of the area will be over the next few years with more than 55% of these lands preserved in line with the best principles of sustainability.



The nature of the development will see partnerships across Government and private sector. Already, the UDC has issued requests for proposals and tenders for several segments of this development.

Development partners are being sought for more than 1100 houses, geared at different market segments, along with the requisite water supply, sewage, and road infrastructure. Works to build out a 69-lot commercial and light industrial subdivision is also out to tender. It therefore means that next year the Caymanas areas will be bustling with activity as the commercial subdivision is built out, and the arrangements are refined with the housing market to start construction.

Lucea

It has become necessary to address the bustling overgrown state of the town of Lucea. The UDC will utilize their expertise to focus on building away from the waterfront, while maintaining existing buildings as heritage sites for tourism and various other economic activities. A public park is also envisioned for this historic town.

Font Hill

As the southwest of the island opens with the new South Coast Highway, the UDC will manage a process of master planning the more than 3000 acres in Font Hill, St. Elizabeth. The planning efforts will create a comprehensive and integrated master plan which establishes a vision for Font Hill, by identifying the most suitable land uses, and chart an achievable course for the future.

The master plan will identify a main urban center with a comprehensive system of infrastructure consisting of new and upgraded roads, water supply, sustainable and reliable sources of energy, centralized sewerage, reliable telecommunications, and information & communication technologies (ICT), adequate public safety and security, modern educational and health facilities, along with low-density hotel accommodations that will serve to complement both the existing and proposed attractions in the region. These efforts will leverage the investment being made in the highway works to the south of the island, therefore transforming the southwest region of Jamaica.

Public Spaces

Parks/Public Spaces

We know that properly planned towns, urban spaces, and cities with well-designed public spaces translate to happier, healthier, and wealthier people, improving people movement, enabling commercial activity, creating more liveable, and productive centres. And so, the UDC, in its regional planning role across large areas, will continue its Urban Spaces Programme which focuses on creating public spaces. With at least one park slated for every parish, UDC continues to lead this effort breaking ground on January 17, 2024, for the Portmore Resilience Park. We are now working towards its completion in September 2025.



Our lovely waterfront along the Kingston Harbour which draws national interest and pulls thousands of Jamaicans every New Year's Eve, is a sleeping giant in terms of development potential.

The 25km linear park along Kingston Harbour is starting to move towards reality, designs for more than half of the park will start shortly, this includes the leg from Downtown to Rae Town and from Rae Town to Harbour View.

CREATING A SOCIAL SAFETY NET AND ADDRESSING GENERATIONAL POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

Madam Speaker, after over 60 years of independence, too many of our fellow citizens are still trapped in a cycle of poverty, unable to break free from its suffocating grasp. For far too long, generations have endured the hardships of economic deprivation, with little hope for improvement. The stark reality is that without intervention, this cycle will persist, condemning countless individuals and families to a life of struggle and despair.

Madam Speaker, the globally used measure of inequality is the Gini index, or Gini coefficient, which measures income distribution across a population. The coefficient ranges from 0 (or 0%) to 1 (or 100%), with 0 representing perfect equality and 1 representing perfect inequality.

The higher the Gini coefficient, the greater the gap between the incomes of a country's richest and poorest people. The Jamaica Survey of Living Conditions uses consumption expenditure to estimate the Gini coefficient. In 2021, the Gini coefficient was 0.3991, an increase from 0.3671 in 2019. For comparison, South Africa has the highest Gini coefficient globally at 0.63 while Norway has the lowest at 0.227. The last available figure for Trinidad is 0.403 (in 1992) and for Barbados is 0.47 (in 2010).

Madam Speaker, step-by-step my administration is creating a Social Safety Net to protect the most vulnerable in our society.

In 2021, we introduced the Social Pension programme which provides a guaranteed income for 12,000 vulnerable Jamaicans aged 75 and older. In this year's budget, the allocation for the social pension has been increased by 65%.

We have increased investment in the New Social Housing Programme which aims to improve the housing conditions of the country's poor and indigent population. 213 houses have so far been built under the Programme.

In 2022, we introduced the Tourism Workers Pension Scheme, becoming the only country in the world with a comprehensive pension plan for tourism workers.



In this year's budget, we have increased the allocation to PATH by approximately 30%.

The Minister of Finance and the Public Service announced in his budget presentation that we will be introducing unemployment insurance. The feasibility study has been done and in the first quarter of 2024/25, we expect to sign a US\$20 million loan agreement with the World Bank under which the Ministry of Labour and Social Security will receive the technical support for implementation of unemployment insurance, among other things.

Madam Speaker, unemployment insurance is a critical element of a social safety net, providing financial assistance to those who find themselves without a job through no fault of their own. For example, between April and June 2020, 150,000 workers lost their jobs in Jamaica with the advent of the pandemic.

Unemployment insurance ensures that they can meet their basic needs and maintain a sense of dignity and security as they navigate the uncertainties of unemployment. By mitigating the financial impact of job loss, unemployment insurance also helps prevent families from falling into poverty and homelessness. It also fosters economic resilience by enabling individuals to weather temporary setbacks without resorting to desperate measures that could exacerbate their circumstances and strain our social services.

Jamaica 60 HOPE For Children Trust Fund

Madam Speaker, beyond unemployment insurance, we must also invest in programmes that create opportunities for individuals and families to escape the cycle of generational poverty. This requires a multifaceted approach that tackles the root causes of poverty and systemic barriers to economic mobility. Thousands of our children in low-income families reach adulthood without any household savings to give them a start in life. This perpetuates the cycle of poverty. We have to break this cycle.

Today, I am pleased to announce that the Government will establish the Jamaica 60 HOPE (Hope, Opportunity, Prosperity and Empowerment) For Children Trust Fund. **Madam Speaker**, the purpose of the Fund is to help close the wealth gap and address the issue of intergenerational poverty by creating a trust account specifically catered to vulnerable children. The HOPE for Children Trust Fund will provide each eligible child with a long-term savings account funded through annual contributions from the Government. Parents, guardians or other donors will also be able make deposits into the account for the future benefit of the child. The accumulated funds including interest will be accessible on or after the child's 18th birthday for specific purposes such as education, purchase of a home or commercial property, or business investment. **Madam Speaker**, any Jamaican child born on or after the 60th anniversary of our independence (August 6, 2022) who is part of a PATH household or a Ward of the State will be eligible for the programme.



Madam Speaker, the central idea behind the programme is to provide children with a lump sum to give them a start in life upon attaining adulthood.

Madam Speaker, we will also explore alternatives to establish and manage this programme. It could be part of the National Insurance Fund or we may consider having private insurance companies administer the Trust Fund.

Madam Speaker, my administration does not just talk about poverty. We have undertaken the most significant expansion of the Social Security system in Jamaica since independence. We are committed to addressing the underlying structural inequalities that perpetuate poverty and limit upward mobility for marginalized communities and to doing so in a deliberate sustainable way. This means dismantling barriers to education, healthcare, employment and housing, and ensuring access to opportunities for all Jamaicans, regardless of their background or circumstances.

As a result of the dividends from our macroeconomic success, it is now within our power to enact meaningful change and provide a brighter future for all Jamaicans.

SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP

Madam Speaker, the Government of Jamaica remains committed to the spirit of national partnership. In 2022, we reinforced our social dialogue framework by signing a new agreement, "A Partnership for Jamaica's Strong and Sustainable Recovery." In line with the agreement, this year, the National Partnership Council has been active, addressing key issues such as crime, environmental concerns and constitutional reform.

National Partnership Day was celebrated on October 25 and this marks a significant step in solidifying and celebrating our commitment to collaborative governance.

These efforts are a testament to our dedication to fostering a collaborative environment to navigate challenges and ensure a prosperous, peaceful, and productive future for all Jamaicans.

CONCLUSION

Madam Speaker, to use a football analogy, through the diligent work and sacrifice of many, Jamaica is now at a World Cup level of economic performance:

- 20 consecutive quarters of economic growth before COVID and 10 consecutive quarters of economic growth after COVID. This is the longest unbroken period of economic expansion since Independence.



- Record low unemployment of 4.2%. Over 156,000 new jobs have been created since 2016.
- In 2023, we had a record four million tourist arrivals with over US\$4.2 billion in tourism earnings and we are set to break that record in 2024. In the first two months of 2024, we have already recorded one million tourist arrivals and over US\$1 billion in tourism earnings.
- Our debt as a percentage of GDP is at the lowest level in 30 years and at the end of next fiscal year will be the lowest in 50 years.
- All three global ratings agencies – S&P, Moody's and Fitch - have upgraded Jamaica's credit ratings to the highest levels in our history.
- Jamaica's Corruption Perception Index is at the best level in our history and certainly better than under any PNP administration. Ah nuh mi seh so, is Transparency International seh so!

Madam Speaker, a win for Jamaica, is a win for everyone.

While this Government is delivering tangible results, the truth is that the Opposition has no plan to uplift the people of Jamaica. Their whole strategy is "Destabilisation Through Noise and Distraction" by playing grievance politics.

They say they would increase the threshold to \$3 million, and make a bag of other promises. We have still not heard how they would finance it. It is all hype and no substance.

Madam Speaker, I know the members on that side feel left out... it is a rough position to be in. I have been there. But they shouldn't allow 'bad mind' and carry feelings that lead to desperation for power, at all costs.

One day, they agree with something, then a few months later, if it is not politically expedient, they change their minds. That is not leadership. We call that flip flopping and wagonism.

The Opposition supported and seconded the Speaker's nomination, and then they switched. Flip Floppers!

The Opposition initially proposed and supported salary increases for politicians, then they switched. Flip Floppers!

They all took their pay increases anyway, every single one of them including the Leader of the Opposition, while I as Prime Minister did not. Hypocrites!

The Opposition supported the duties of the Political Ombudsman to be subsumed by the Electoral Commission, then they switched. Flip Floppers!

The Opposition supported States of Public Emergency to fight crime, then they switched. Flip Floppers!



How can Jamaica have any trust in people who will just sway with the wind, whose word means nothing? What they say today, they will resile from tomorrow. Jamaica cannot afford unstable, unprincipled leadership. We have been there, and we are done with that. We have seen where 'sweet mout' populist promises financed by "run wid it" fiscal deficits took us as a country. Never again!

Jamaicans want better lives. They need a team that has been winning for Jamaica, a team that is tried, tested and has delivered tangible results.

Madam Speaker, a former Prime Minister of Jamaica said "it takes cash to care". Another former Prime Minister said "we put people first". For decades, the country has debated and oscillated between these two competing philosophies. As a student of history, I believe both philosophies have merit but neither by itself is complete. The people of Jamaica want us to put these two philosophies together and that is what my administration is doing. We are building a "Caring Economy for ALL". We know how to generate the cash. And we will use that cash to care!

1. This is why we have invested in our public sector workers and given the largest salary increase in history.
2. This is why we removed fees from HEART and created the LIFT Programme, and now the CARE programme.
3. This is why we have removed the guarantor requirement for student loans and have allocated \$200 million to help over 1,000 students with tertiary education fees
4. This is why we have allocated \$1.9 billion to continue the construction of classrooms and sanitary facilities, electrical upgrading, installation of sewage treatment facilities and installation of security fencing at many schools.
5. This is why we created the Social Pension Programme and have now increased it by 65%.
6. This is why we increased the NIS pension and other benefits last year and this year increased the pension relief and also increased age relief from \$80,000 to \$250,000 annually.
7. This is why we created the Social Housing Programme under which over 200 houses have been built.
8. This is why we have increased the allocation to PATH this year by almost 30%.
9. This is why we are introducing the HOPE for Children Trust Fund to ensure every Jamaican child can get a start in life on reaching adulthood and break the cycle of generational poverty.
10. This is why we have allocated \$20 billion under the SPARK programme to focus on community roads.
11. This is why we have reduced JUTC bus fares.
12. This is why we have undertaken the largest expansion and improvement of water infrastructure all over the country.
13. This is why we have allocated J\$3.5 billion for irrigation to support farmers in South Clarendon, South St. Catherine and the Essex Valley in St. Elizabeth to increase agricultural production and productivity.

14. This is why we have allocated \$11.5 billion in the budget to build or upgrade four hospitals at the same time. This has never been done before in our history.
15. This is why we have allocated J\$2.6 billion in the budget for 100 new buses prior to back to school later this year.
16. This is why we have allocated J\$916 million in the budget to acquire 50 new garbage trucks.
17. This is why we have increased the income tax threshold from 1.5 million to 1.7 million and you have my commitment that we will do more, but we will do it sustainably without putting our fiscal stability at risk.
18. This is why for nine(9) consecutive budgets, this government has imposed NO NET NEW TAXES on the people.

Madam Speaker, this Government recognizes that the contribution of minimum wage earners, such as household workers, artisans, labourers, store clerks, and security personnel, is vital to the success of our manufacturers, hotels, professionals, lawyers, doctors, and teachers in meeting our national productivity and service targets. This is why in 2023, we increased the minimum wage by 44% - the largest percentage increase that any Government has given to minimum wage earners in Jamaica in the last 20 years.

Madam Speaker, despite all this, we know the people of Jamaica have been waiting for decades.

We need to do more, and the people of Jamaica have my commitment that we will do more. This government has demonstrated that we are not about empty promises. We have the capacity to deliver, and we will deliver.

Madam Speaker, I close with the words of the good book which always serves as a source of guidance and inspiration. I say to my Parliamentary colleagues and to the people of Jamaica, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." - Galatians Chapter 6 verse 9.

Jamaica has been involved in a long struggle, literally we have been in the wilderness for 40 years. We are now beginning to see the realisation of the true destiny of the Jamaican people. To live in peace, to be productive, and to be prosperous.

May God Bless You and Bless **Jamaica Land We Love**.



BUILDING A CARING ECONOMY FOR YOU

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