



GOVERNMENT  
OF JAMAICA

# Budget Debate

2 0 2 5

JAMAICA'S NEXT CHAPTER:

Accelerating Growth for Your

Peace,  
Productivity  
& Prosperity

March  
**20**  
2025

Presented By:  
Prime Minister, Dr. the Most Honourable  
**Andrew Michael Holness, ON, PC, MP**

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Government of Jamaica

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**PEACE, PRODUCTIVITY  
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Thursday, March 20, 2026

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# INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Excellencies of the Diplomatic Corps,

Jamaicans at home and in the diaspora, listening, watching and following on various media platforms,  
Distinguished ladies and gentlemen in the gallery,

I stand before this Honourable House with a heart full of gratitude. First and foremost, I give thanks to Almighty God for His grace, wisdom, and countless mercies to allow me to stand here for the tenth time to deliver my contribution to the National Budget Debates.

## **Madam Speaker,**

Honourable Members,

Senators and Former Members seated in the well, blessings to you and on our nation. Each day we are given, is an opportunity to serve, to improve, and to uplift the lives of our fellow Jamaicans, and I do not take that responsibility lightly.

I am deeply grateful to my family for their love and support — especially my wife, Juliet, and my mother, whose presence here and prayers continue to strengthen me. Madam Speaker, allow me to express further gratitude and commendations for your firm and balanced hand in guiding the affairs of this House. To my colleagues in Cabinet, our Parliamentary team, and the dedicated members of our Party, I appreciate your steadfast commitment to the people of Jamaica. And to my West Central St. Andrew family—thank you for allowing me the privilege of representing you.

I also extend my sincere appreciation to my Personal Staff and my advisers for their tireless work and support. I want to thank the hardworking Public Sector workers, Permanent Secretaries, and Board Members whose work has made the many achievements of this administration possible. I especially want to acknowledge the work of the security forces who face great danger in keeping Jamaica safe. In the same breath allow me to thank the members of my security detail for their dedication and vigilance, oftentimes running that extra mile to ensure I can safely serve the people. I also want to thank the countless industrious Jamaicans — known and unknown — who work tirelessly to keep this country moving forward. Your dedication is the backbone of our progress, and the plans I present today would not be possible without your hard work.

I am especially mindful of the voices of the people — whether spoken in community meetings, shared through letters, emails, and WhatsApp messages or expressed on social media. I hear you. I value your concerns, your ideas, and your hopes for our nation. My Government remains committed to serving you with humility and purpose.



# STRONGEST ECONOMY SINCE INDEPENDENCE

**Madam Speaker**, I stand before you today filled with immense pride as we reflect on the extraordinary progress our nation has made. The achievements are not just incremental improvements; they are historic breakthroughs that have placed our beloved nation in the strongest economic position ever since gaining independence. The numbers do not just tell a story of improvement; they tell a story of transformation—of an economy that has overcome decades of instability, uncertainty, and crisis to achieve a level of stability, strength, and resilience that Jamaica has never before experienced.

**Madam Speaker**, the Leader of the Opposition and Opposition Spokesman on Finance in their presentation attempted to whitewash their record and suggested that analysis of the country’s economic performance does not go back far enough to do justice to their contribution. I do not believe they can complain if we start at Independence. There are several generations of young people who do not know our modern economic history, there are generations of middle-aged and older Jamaicans who experienced the history but did not quite understand it or have forgotten about it. Then there are those who were the architects of our destructive past, some quietly and privately admit shame over their actions, but some still try to justify their actions and absolve themselves of responsibility as they battle for your mind. I don’t like to dwell on the past, but I find myself having to correct the problems of the past, while at the same time, dealing with the current challenges and creating a legacy for the future. We cannot lose this battle for the minds of the people of Jamaica, otherwise we are at risk of having the people who made the mistakes of the past repeat them.

**Madam Speaker**, let us examine the facts.

## Inflation

Period	Party	Years	CPI at start	CPI at end	Total inflation	Average annual inflation (Jamaica)	Average annual inflation (USA)
August 1962 - February 1972	JLP	9.5	0.19	0.30	55.2%	4.7%	3.3%
February 1972 - October 1980	PNP	8.7	0.30	0.62	107.8%	8.8%	8.7%
October 1980 - February 1989	JLP	8.3	0.62	1.78	187.4%	13.5%	4.4%
February 1989 - September 2007	PNP	18.6	1.78	41.71	2249.2%	18.5%	2.9%
September 2007 - December 2011	JLP	4.3	41.71	68.25	63.6%	12.3%	1.5%
December 2011 - February 2016	PNP	4.2	68.25	87.93	28.8%	6.3%	1.2%
February 2016 - February 2025	JLP	9.0	87.93	141.80	61.3%	5.5%	3.4%

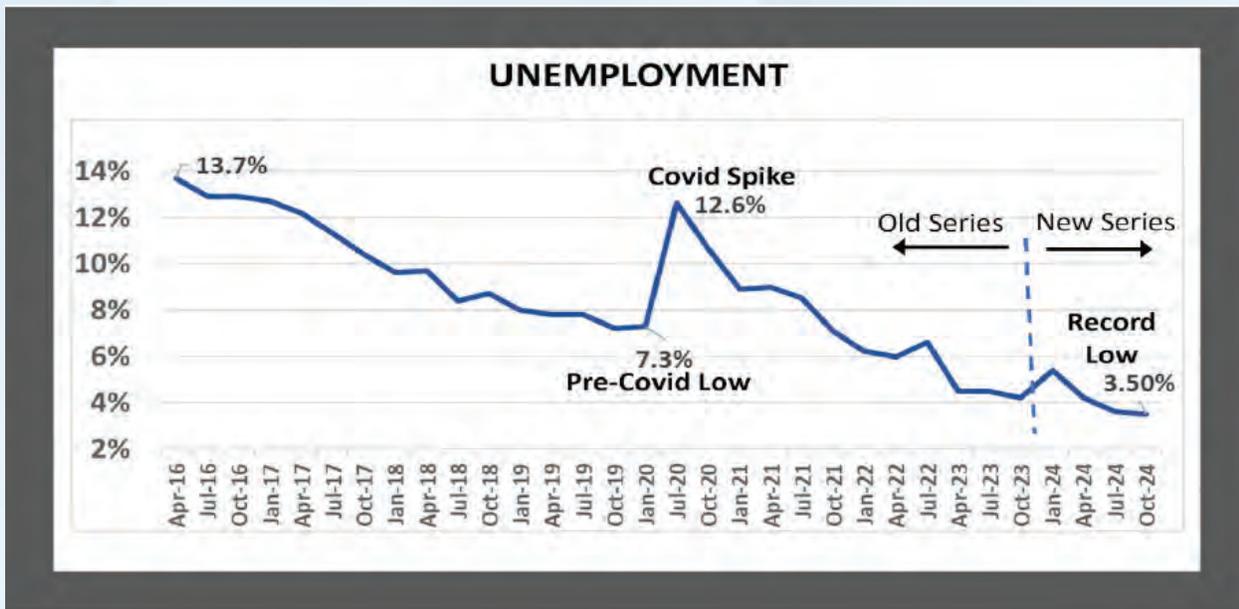
Source: Consumer Price Indices from [boj.org.jm/statistics/real-sector/inflation/](http://boj.org.jm/statistics/real-sector/inflation/)

The table now being displayed shows that the average annual inflation under my administration has been 5.5%, the lowest under any administration since 1972. This is within the inflation target of 4-6% despite the effects of global inflation resulting from the postCOVID supply chain shocks and geopolitical conflicts. Without the post-COVID inflation spike, we could safely project that our average annual inflation rate would have trended around 4.3%.

The period of highest inflation in Jamaica's history was under the PNP administration of 1989-2007. During that period, inflation averaged 18.5% PER YEAR resulting in cumulative inflation of 2,249%. Madam Speaker, in 1980 a loaf of bread cost less than a dollar. In 2007, it cost \$130. Cumulative inflation in the USA over the same period was 71.5% or 2.9% per year. In 1992, Jamaica's inflation rate was nearly 80%. Imagine, in one single year Jamaica had more inflation than the USA had over the same 18.5 years! Madam Speaker, it is this period of runaway inflation under the PNP that is the starting point of Jamaica's economic woes.

**Madam Speaker**, our current annual rate of inflation is now down to 4.4%, at the lower end of the Bank of Jamaica's target range of 4-6%. Through well-managed fiscal and monetary policy, we have brought inflation back down to sustainable levels. **My administration has instituted a robust policy of inflation targeting through disciplined monetary policy of the independent Central Bank supported by responsible fiscal policies of the Central Government. We must not allow the failed policies of the PNP to destroy the gains we have made in managing inflation over these decades.**

### Employment and Job Creation



**Madam Speaker**, let us look at unemployment. When the PNP left office in 2016, the unemployment rate was 13.7%. Now, the unemployment rate is at a historic low of 3.5% almost full employment. In 2016, youth unemployment was at an alarming 32%! Now it is down to 11%.

Since 2016, we have created 253,000 new jobs. That is an average of 28,000 new jobs per year. The last PNP administration between 2011 and 2016 created an average of 15,000 jobs per year. Our rate of job creation is nearly twice that of the PNP.

**Madam Speaker**, these are not just statistics; they represent real jobs, impacting people, families and communities. Young people who once faced limited opportunities now see doors opening. Mothers and fathers who struggled to make ends meet are now securing stable employment.

**Jamaica today has the strongest economy since Independence. Jamaica has a bright future. We are not going back to the failed policies of the PNP.**

**Exchange Rate**

Period	Party	Years	J\$/US\$ Exchange rate at start	J\$/US\$ Exchange rate at end	Total depreciation	Average annual depreciation
February 1972 - October 1980	PNP	8.7	0.77	1.78	131.2%	10.2%
October 1980 - February 1989	JLP	8.3	1.78	5.51	209.6%	14.5%
February 1989 - September 2007	PNP	18.6	5.51	70.41	1177.9%	14.7%
September 2007 - December 2011	JLP	4.3	70.41	86.60	23.0%	5.0%
December 2011 - February 2016	PNP	4.2	86.60	121.85	40.7%	8.5%
February 2016 - February 2025	JLP	9.0	121.85	157.33	29.1%	2.9%

*Source: Official exchange rates from boj.org.jm*

**Madam Speaker**, I now turn to the exchange rate.

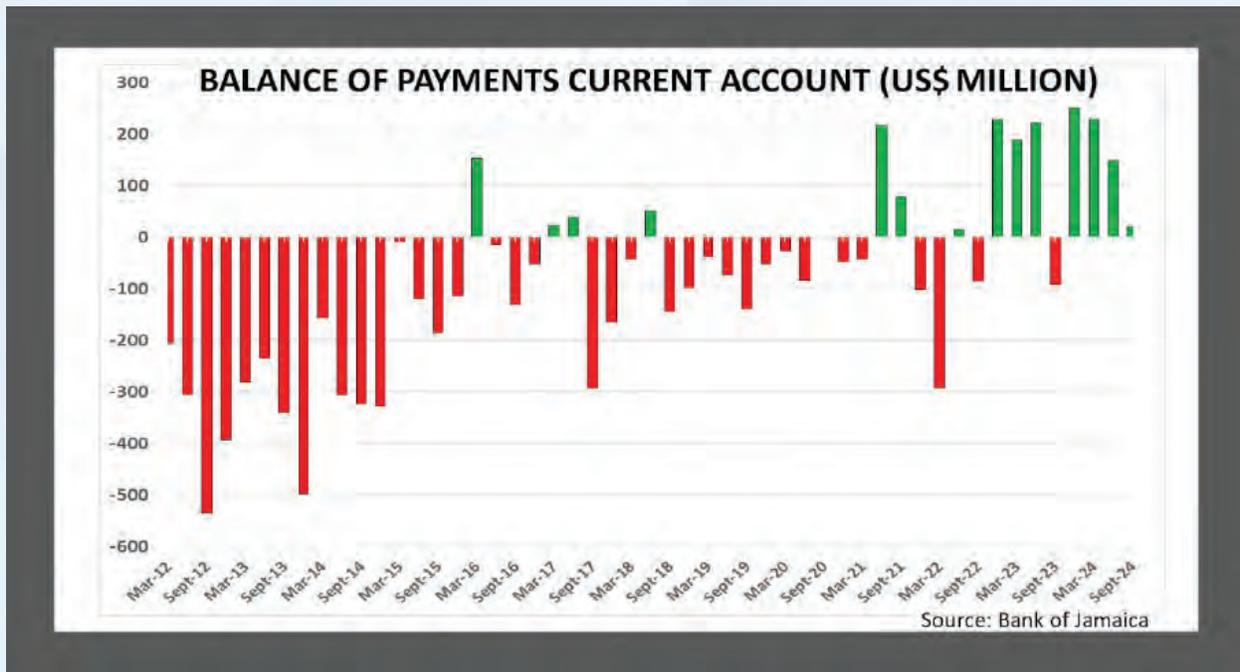
The table now being displayed shows that during the past nine (9) years, the Jamaican dollar has depreciated by an average of 2.9% per year relative to the US dollar. This is by far the lowest rate of currency depreciation under any political administration since Independence. By contrast, **Madam Speaker**, the dollar depreciated by an average of 8.5% annually under the last PNP administration. And the worst currency depreciation took place under the PNP administration of 1989-2007. When they assumed office in 1989, the exchange rate was J\$5.51 to US\$1. When they left in 2007, the dollar had fallen to J\$70.41 to US\$1 – a whopping 1,178% depreciation. Madam Speaker, it is this period of foreign exchange volatility under the PNP that is the starting point of Jamaica’s recent economic woes.

Jamaica today has the most robust and transparent foreign exchange (FX) market in the region and the most stable FX environment since our Independence. This stability did not happen by chance — it is the product of sound fiscal and monetary policies, increased investor confidence, and a growing economy that is attracting capital rather than creating capital flight.

We must never allow the failed policies of the PNP to destroy this.

## Balance of Payments

**Madam Speaker**, an important factor in achieving sustained currency stability is the country's balance of payments. The balance of payments current account is like Jamaica's "income statement" with the rest of the world. It tracks the money flowing in and out of the country from trade, services, and remittances. If the money coming in from exports of goods and services and remittances exceeds the money going out to pay for imports of goods and services, the current account is in surplus (positive). And conversely, if the outflows exceed the inflows, the current account is in deficit.

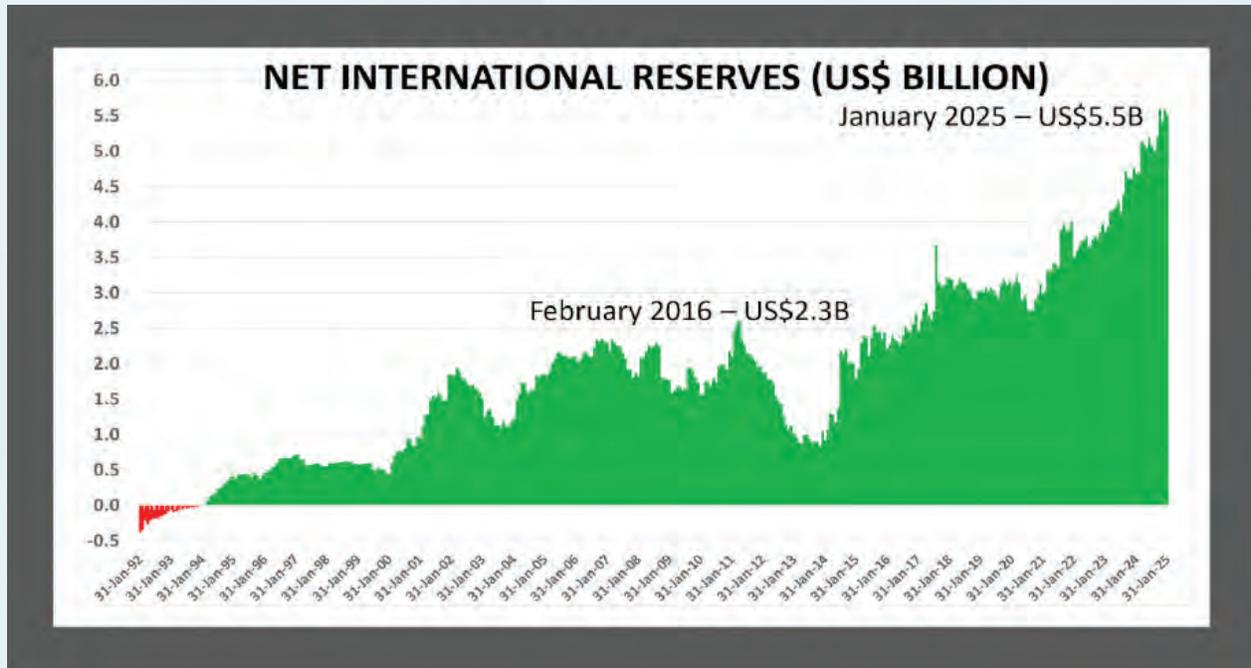


**Madam Speaker**, in the 62 years since Independence, Jamaica has recorded persistent current account deficits. There have only been five (5) years in which we recorded a surplus 1963, 1993 and 1995 – in which we had a minor surplus. However, in fiscal year 2022/23 we recorded a surplus of 1.9% of GDP and in 2023/24 we recorded a surplus of 3.1% of GDP.

The graph now being displayed shows the quarterly current account balance since 2012. It shows that we have recorded a surplus for seven (7) of the last eight (8) quarters. So we are well on track to record our third consecutive year of a surplus in the current fiscal year, 2024/25.

Jamaica today has the strongest economy since Independence. We are not going back to the failed policies of the PNP.

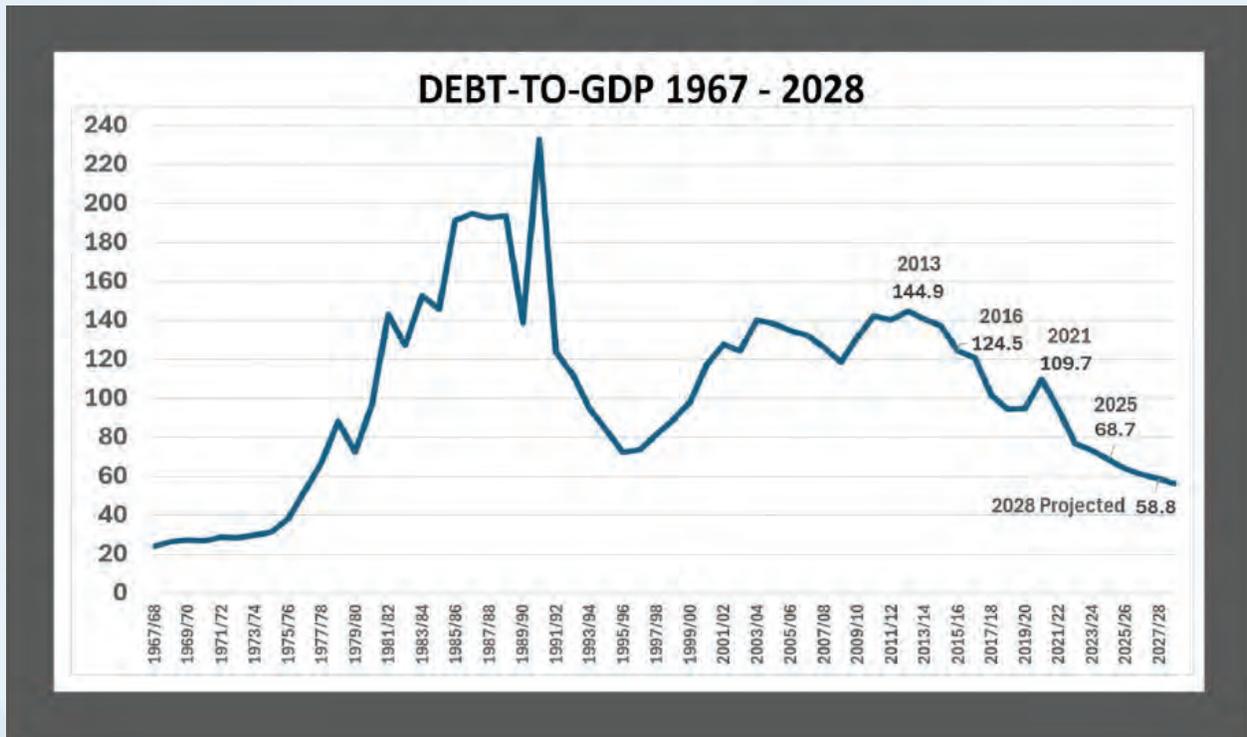
### Net International Reserves



**Madam Speaker**, our Net International Reserves now stand at a record high of US\$5.5 billion representing 29 weeks of goods and services imports. This provides Jamaica with a crucial buffer against external shocks. In the past, we lived in fear of global financial crises, natural disasters, or commodity price swings that could send our economy into turmoil. Today, we stand prepared and protected, with reserves that give us the confidence and security to navigate the uncertainties of the global economy. When my administration took office in 2016, the NIR was less than half of what it is today. We have increased the NIR by 131%! And we have done so despite facing the worst global health and economic crisis in 100 years.

**Jamaica today has the strongest economy since Independence and we will not allow the PNP to have a party with our rent money!**

## Debt Management



**Madam Speaker**, perhaps one of the most remarkable indicators of our economic transformation is our debt-to-GDP ratio, which has fallen to unprecedented levels. When my administration took office the debt-to-GDP was over 120%. It is now approximately 68.7% and we are on track to meet our target of 60% by March 2028.

It is important, especially for young Jamaicans, to understand the roots of our debt crises. Jamaica faced two major periods of debt distress. The first, from the 1970s to the late 1980s, was driven by two global oil shocks, a failed experiment with democratic socialism, a global recession that slashed bauxite revenues, and hurricanes Allen and Gilbert in 1980 and 1988 respectively. The second, from the 1990s to the 2010s, stemmed largely from the PNP's policies during the FINSAC era, which collapsed financial institutions, wiped out the business class, and triggered a prolonged recession — worsened by the 2008–2009 global financial crisis.

In the mid-1990s, Jamaica faced a financial sector crisis which resulted in the collapse of a number of financial institutions. This financial sector meltdown was not caused by any exogenous shocks or global crisis. In fact, the US, our major trading partner had robust growth in the 1990s averaging 3.4% per annum. This was purely caused by bad government, bad policy choices and poor superintendence of the economy. **FINSAC was a homegrown domestic crisis wholly caused by the PNP, for which we are now only just recovering.**

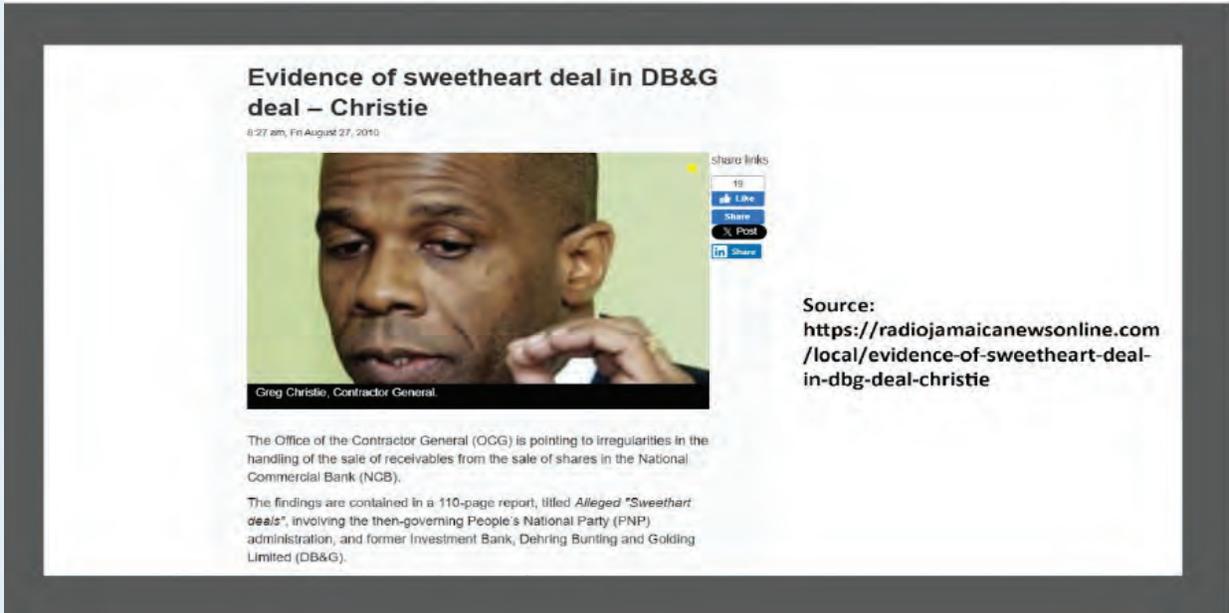
Our debt-to-GDP prior to the advent of the FINSAC crisis, was 72%. The Government at the time established FINSAC to bailout the collapsed financial institutions. This bailout cost the country 42% of

GDP. By way of comparison, the US Government's bailout intervention during the global financial crisis of 2008/09 was only 9% of their GDP.

Within six (6) years after the establishment of FINSAC, our debt spiralled out of control from 72% to 130% of GDP, almost doubling. That caused interest costs alone on the debt to consume almost 70% of tax revenues. If you add Public Sector wages to that, there was nothing left – nothing to fix roads, nothing to provide water, nothing to upgrade hospitals, nothing to build schools. If you are wondering why so much of our infrastructure has been left unmaintained and now failing, a good place to start looking for answers is the FINSAC era under the PNP.

**Madam Speaker**, the root cause of the crisis was the premature policy decision of the PNP to liberalise the foreign exchange market in 1991 without the necessary pre-conditions such as reserves in place. In other words they went to 'party', but didn't have any money. This triggered a rapid depreciation of the Jamaican dollar and skyrocketing prices with inflation reaching 80% in 1991 and 40% in 1992. Not having any "rent money" to ward off speculators, the Government then tried to protect the exchange rate through exorbitant interest rates. As a result, productive enterprises, especially small businesses, were unable to service their loans and the loans became non-performing. Mounting non-performing loans and loan defaults then caused the banks to collapse.

**Madam Speaker**, the PNP's high interest rate policy created a two-tiered economy — one where cash-rich speculators thrived, while productive businesses drowned in insurmountable debt. This led to what a prominent member of the PNP described as "the largest transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich since slavery". **Madam Speaker**, who were the beneficiaries of this wealth transfer from the poor to the rich? Is there anyone in this House who was a part of this ill-conceived policy, whose business it was to profit from this great transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich?



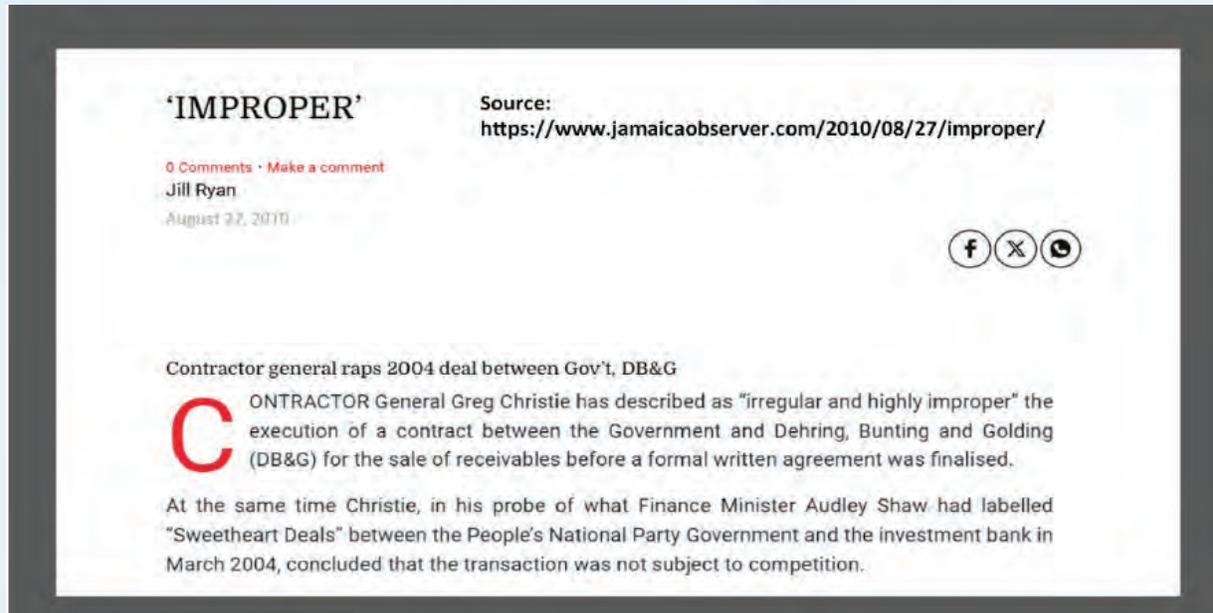
**Evidence of sweetheart deal in DB&G deal – Christie**  
6:27 am, Fri August 27, 2010

Greg Christie, Contractor General.

The Office of the Contractor General (OCG) is pointing to irregularities in the handling of the sale of receivables from the sale of shares in the National Commercial Bank (NCB).

The findings are contained in a 110-page report, titled *Alleged "Sweetheart deals"*, involving the then-governing People's National Party (PNP) administration, and former Investment Bank, Dehring Bunting and Golding Limited (DB&G).

Source:  
<https://radiojamaicanewsonline.com/local/evidence-of-sweetheart-deal-in-dbg-deal-christie>



The fallout was immense — it is estimated that over 40,000 businesses collapsed, wiping out entrepreneurs and leaving thousands destitute. This decimated the manufacturing sector in Jamaica, burdened with high-cost debt, and unable to retool to keep competitive, many factories closed during this period. We recall companies such as Thermo-plastics, Highgate Food Products, Homelectrix and hundreds of others too numerous to name, that could not survive the inhospitable climate FINSAC created.

**Madam Speaker**, those who formed the government that presided over this economic debacle have never apologised or even expressed any remorse. Worse, they have the audacity to lecture this administration on how to run the economy.

For the next 20 years after the PNP self-inflicted FINSAC shock, we basically just meandered along as a country with no attempt to fix the real problem. Our debt situation was already unsustainable when the global financial crisis hit in 2008/09 and that took the country to the verge of bankruptcy.

The first real attempt at grappling with the “high-debt high-interest rate” vicious cycle created by the PNP, started with the Bruce Golding-led Administration of 2007 to 2011. Indeed, we fathered the deep structural reforms needed to break the PNP-created debt crisis. The debt inherited from the PNP had reached unsustainable levels, and it was under the leadership of Bruce Golding and Audley Shaw, supported by enlightened and patriotic members of the Private Sector and reasonable unions, that the first structured debt exchange was engineered, JDX. This pulled Jamaica from the brink of another financial collapse by successfully **reducing Jamaica’s interest costs**, extending **debt maturity**, improving **debt sustainability and giving the country the credibility to approach the IMF**. We put in place the **Fiscal Responsibility Framework (FRF)** which **enhanced transparency, accountability and reporting** on public finances and placed **limits on the fiscal deficit**. This is the basis for the fiscal rule legislation and all the other reforms we have today. We took tough steps to divest loss-making Public

Sector entities such as the Sugar Company and Air Jamaica, which racked up huge debt and operating losses carried over from the 18½ years of poor management and lack of superintendence of the Public Sector bodies. And when we were the Opposition we did our part in supporting and developing many nascent measures, including working assiduously on every piece of legislation required to meet IMF timelines. We were a responsible and constructive father, even in Opposition, to the reform seeds we planted. We acted in the interest of Jamaica's economic recovery. In everything we did, we chose Jamaica over narrow political and partisan gains!

No one on this side has ever said that the PNP did not contribute to the national effort to restructure and reform the economy to bring down the debt. As recently as November last year at the launch of our Next Chapter policy pivot, I said, "Let me express my deepest gratitude to all who played a role in this transformation: leaders from both sides of the political aisle, business leaders, our civil service, unions, members of civil society, and most importantly, the Jamaican people. I want to specially recognise and thank:

- The Honourable Bruce Golding, Former Prime Minister
- The Most Honourable Portia Simpson-Miller, Former Prime Minister
- The Honourable Peter Phillips, former Leader of the Opposition and Minister of Finance
- The Honourable Audley 'Man a Yaad' Shaw, former Minister of Finance
- Nigel Clarke, former Minister of Finance
- Richard Byles, Governor of the Bank of Jamaica and former Chairman of the Economic Policy Oversight Committee (EPOC)
- Keith Duncan, who took over as Chairman of EPOC after Mr. Byles
- All the members of the National Partnership Council
- But most of all, I want to thank the people of Jamaica for their patience, resilience, courage and sacrifice. Jamaica's turnaround would have been impossible without the willingness of the Jamaican people to endure the hardships that they had to bear."

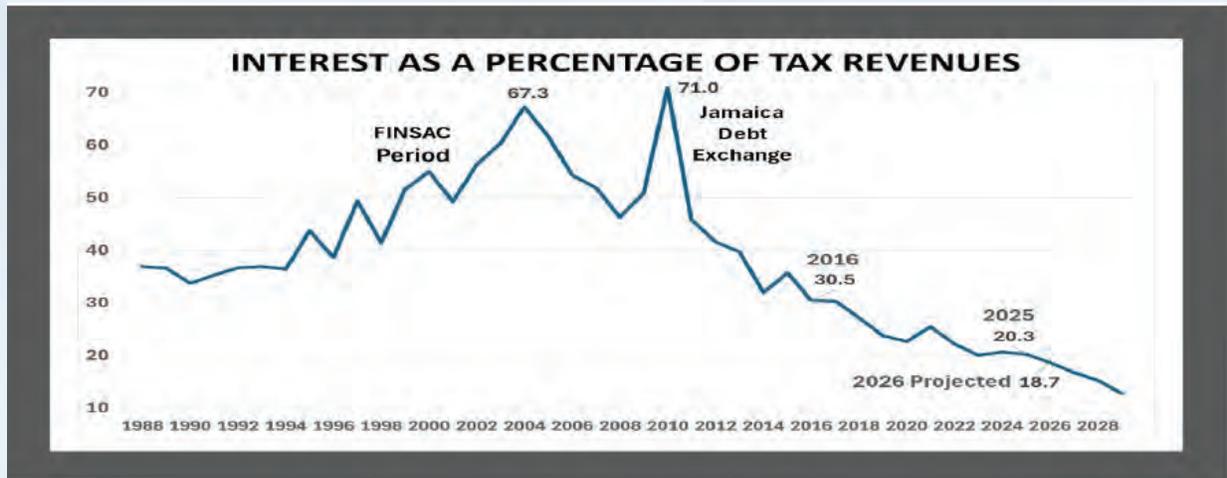
Let me give a fair and balanced characterisation of the historical development of the Jamaican economy. The PNP through bad policy decisions created the second debt crisis, the JLP took the first fundamental steps to address the problem, the PNP contributed and built on those steps, and the JLP further built on those steps and completed the reforms. While we acknowledge the work of the PNP in the national effort across administration, any political credit they should get for contributing to the solution is totally wiped out because they are the ones whose bad policy caused the problem in the first place!

True to their bipolar nature, the PNP wants to claim paternity after causing the mother – the people – so much hardship. In their last budget presentation the Leader of the Opposition and the Opposition Spokesman on Finance disingenuously accused the Government of increasing taxes on the people of Jamaica. In his Budget presentation last year, the Leader of the Opposition said "since this JLP Government came to office they have more than doubled the annual tax take ..., increasing it by a massive \$190,000 per person". Yet in his recent Budget presentation this year he says that the improved performance of tax revenues is due to the tax reform work of the PNP. So is it the PNP that is responsible for Jamaicans paying more taxes?

In the 2023 Budget, the Leader of the Opposition complained that the Government was moving too fast to reduce debt. He advocated that we abandon the fiscally responsible path, use JA\$40B (in other words, party with the rent money) from debt repayment to spend on temporary relief. In this Budget, when he sees the amazing benefit of reducing the debt to 68%, he is now claiming that the reduction in the debt is due to the PNP's faithfulness to fiscal prudence.

This reminds me of the classic tale of what we call in Jamaica the "wutliss" father who causes the mother so much pain, and then abandons the child, but when the child grows up to be successful, out of the blue, they turn up to claim paternity and associate with the success. The Leader of the Opposition is a man of convenience, flip-flopping between prudence and popularity when it suits him. One minute he disowns the child of fiscal discipline and then the next he claims the child of fiscal discipline. The mother, remembers the pain of FINSAC and the high interest rate policy, the largest transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich, and she knows that she cannot trust this "wutliss" man. So she did the DNA test, and the results are in. When it comes to 15-year-old Fiscal Discipline, PNP you are NOT the father. Yes, your name was called, but it is another Golding that is the father!

**Madam Speaker**, jokes aside, this is the first time our debt-to-GDP ratio has fallen to below pre-FINSAC levels in the mid-1990s. It has therefore taken us 30 years to undo the damage of the self-inflicted blow of the PNP's economic mismanagement of the 1990s.



**Madam Speaker**, the graph now being displayed shows interest costs as a percentage of our tax revenues. In the mid-1990s during the FINSAC period, interest costs as a percentage of tax revenues climbed rapidly, peaking at nearly 70%. In the midst of the Global Financial Crisis between 2008 to 2009 it peaked again at about 71% and started to decline after the successful 2010 Jamaica Debt Exchange to 30.5% in 2016 when this administration took the reins of Government, and as of this Budget only 18.7% of tax revenues will go towards paying interest on debt. This is the result of not spending the J\$40 billion on temporary relief, but sticking to the discipline of paying down the debt, the interest on the debt is now smaller, which gives more room to spend sustainably on things that matter to you, like social housing, increasing the income tax exemption threshold, installing water supply, and buying new buses over the last nine-years.

**Madam Speaker**, there is a direct and inextricable link between good economic management and our ability to fix our roads, build hospitals and health centres, build new schools, buy new buses and garbage trucks, provide communities with water, invest in irrigation and support for our farmers. **In other words, Madam Speaker, “good economic management can nyam.” Good economic management produces dividends for the citizens who are shareholders in Jamaica Inc. They have invested their hopes and trust into a government and they expect that their government will be good stewards of the talents.**

## **Taxation**

**Madam Speaker**, my administration has paid dividends to the people of Jamaica through tax reductions and give-backs. The Budget that we have presented represents the 8th consecutive Budget with NO NEW TAXES and the 10th consecutive Budget with no net new taxes whatsoever.

This is unprecedented in Jamaica, but has now become a new feature of the Jamaican economy and I claim paternity for the pickney name “No New Taxes”.

**Madam Speaker**, in fact, we have done much more than not introduce new taxes, we have REDUCED taxes more than in any other period since Independence. Here are some of the dividends the Jamaican people have got from our good stewardship of taxes:

- We have increased the income tax threshold. When we came to office, the threshold was J\$592,800. It is now J\$1.7 million and will move to J\$1.8 million next month, and then to J\$2 million over the next 2 (two) Budgets. Increasing the income tax threshold is my baby, no matter how the PNP tries to claim it now, after first rejecting it. Every PAYE taxpayer should take comfort that as much as we can we will reduce their income tax; it is in our DNA.
- We reduced GCT from 16.5% to 15%. And we are reducing GCT on residential electricity by more than 50%, from 15% to 7%.
- We reduced Transfer Tax on property from 5% to 2% and replaced ad valorem Stamp Duty with a flat rate of J\$5,000 per document.
- We increased the Pension Relief and Age Relief from \$80,000 to \$250,000 each and we plan to increase this in the next budget to \$350,000 each.
- We increased the Turnover Threshold required for registration to pay General Consumption Tax (GCT) from J\$3 million to J\$10 million, and are now increasing it further to J\$15 million. More relief for small businesses!
- 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.
- We reduced estate taxes, reduced the asset tax on financial institutions, abolished the asset tax on non-financial institutions and abolished the minimum business tax.

What did they do during their time? Tax increases year after year. **Madam Speaker**, when they were in government, the people approached the Budget season with trepidation wondering what additional taxes will be imposed. Today, at Budget time, the population is looking forward to “goodies”. However, I prefer to say the Government will deliver dividends on the vote of confidence you place in us. **Madam Speaker**,

we have created an environment of tax certainty and predictability. Workers, families, and businesses – can plan their affairs and think long-term without worrying that the government will impose some tax to mash up their plans.

We are not going back to the days of fiscal recklessness and more and more taxes under the PNP.

**Madam Speaker**, the PNP calls their plan the 4 Es. They definitely have a legacy of 4 Es: Excessive Debt, Economic Erosion, Endless Hardship and Empty Promises.

## **Securitisation**

**Madam Speaker**, at this point I want to address some comments made by the Opposition Spokesman on Finance and the Leader of the Opposition regarding the securitisation transactions that the Government has undertaken.

Securitisation is the packaging and sale of a future income stream from an asset for a lump-sum value today. This Government was successful in creating a concession for the Norman Manley International Airport (NMIA) which generates a reliable income stream. I want the country to remember that the previous PNP Government tried to create a concession out of NMIA and failed miserably. They did not have one bidder!

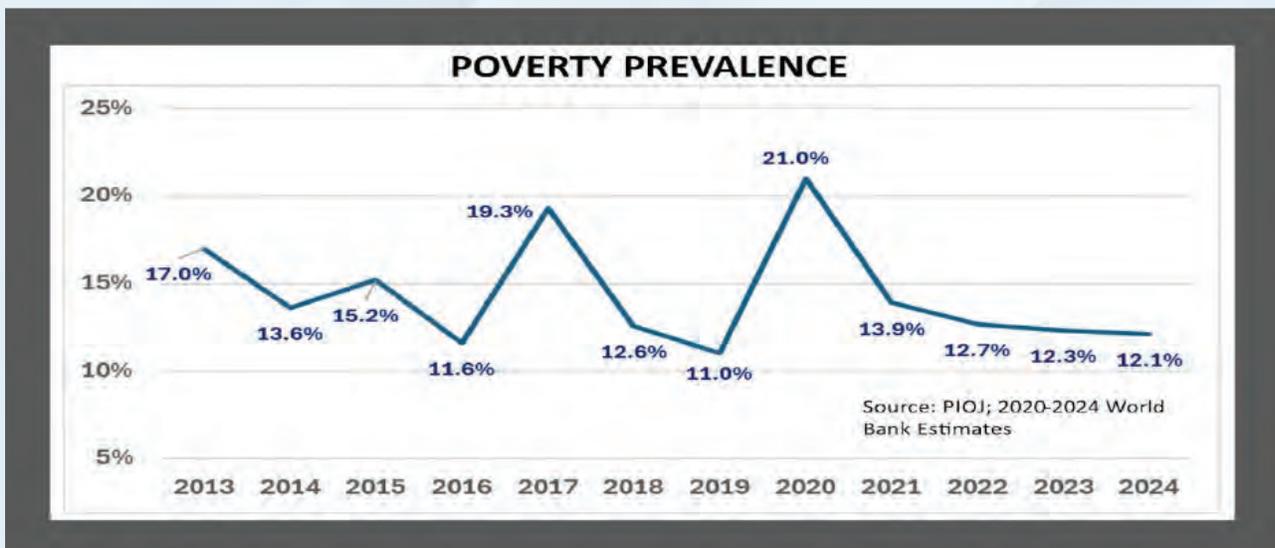
The key question then is what do we do with this lump sum of money – do we use it to party? No! We have used it to pay down debt, in other words relieving ourselves of current and future expense obligations. We have used it to create new infrastructure assets like the extension of Highway 2000 from May Pen to Williamsfield which will enable us to generate more revenues in the future. There is absolutely nothing wrong with this, it is a transparent transaction where there is no risk to the Government. Indeed it is a credit to Jamaica that the international capital markets look favourably at Jamaican securities.

**Madam Speaker**, when is the sale of future income a problem? It is a problem for example, when you forward sell a commodity at a fixed price, that you have not produced and the cost of producing the commodity exceeds the price at which you contracted and already collected upfront, then you end up having to produce the commodity at a loss. This is what the PNP Government did in 2001 when they forward sold bauxite on the international market to finance their FINSAC budget. The Jamaican Government later became exposed when market conditions deteriorated and the cost of producing the bauxite far exceeded the contracted price, and the Government was obliged to honour volumes of bauxite to which it had committed. In 2010, in the midst of the Global Financial Crisis, Jamaica ended up having to pay US\$31 million to the company that produced the bauxite to cover the loss. You can't compare this foolishness of the PNP with our masterful management of the economy. We are not like them. We have a different philosophy; different DNA.



**Madam Speaker**, unlike the forward sale agreements that PNP administrations entered into, the securitisations that we have undertaken are a prudent financial strategy that leverages existing, predictable revenue streams without creating future liabilities or exposing the Government to market risks beyond its control.

### Poverty



**Madam Speaker**, the graph now being displayed illustrates the trajectory of poverty prevalence in our country. It clearly shows that under my administration, we have achieved a steady and measurable

decline in poverty, apart from the temporary spike in 2020 caused by the pandemic. The steady reduction in poverty is clear evidence that our economic gains are reaching the people who need them most.

**Madam Speaker**, we recognise that while progress has been made, much more needs to be done to ensure that the benefits of economic growth are inclusive and sustainable. Our commitment is to shared prosperity — where every Jamaican, regardless of background or location, has access to opportunities for upward mobility. Whether in rural communities, inner-city neighbourhoods, or remote districts, we are working to ensure that no one is left behind and that absolute poverty is eradicated.

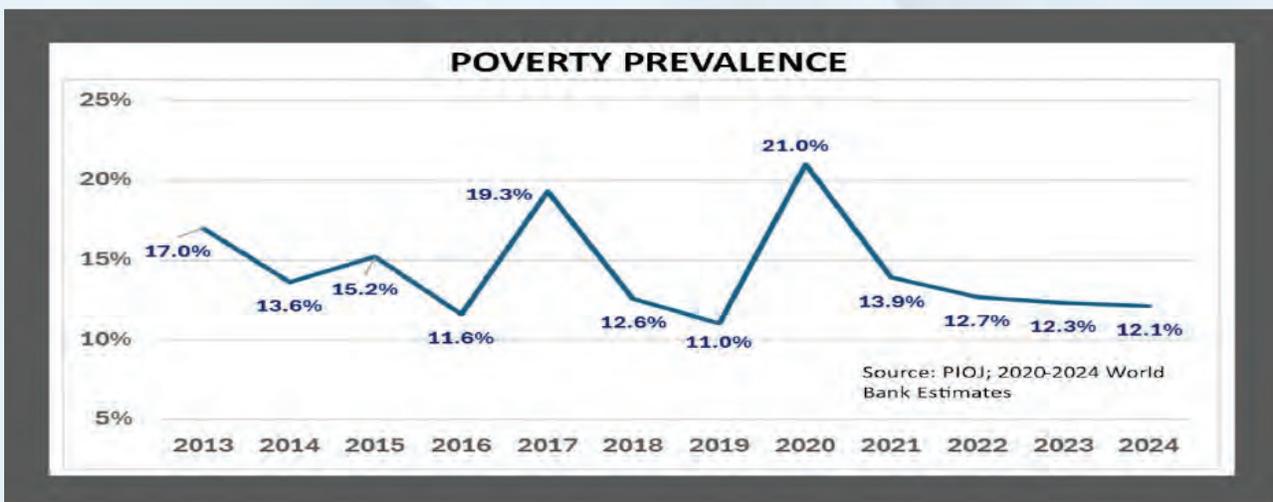
Importantly, **Madam Speaker**, this Government's approach is not about handouts that provide temporary relief but ultimately keep people poor and dependent. We believe in empowerment, not dependency. That is why our policies are designed to equip Jamaicans with the tools, skills, and opportunities they need to lift themselves and their families out of poverty for good.

**Madam Speaker**, the fact that our economy remains on solid ground — despite the combined shocks of global inflation, the lingering effects of the pandemic, and the increasing threats of climate change— is a testament to the progress we have made. This is not just economic progress — it is economic transformation.

This transformation did not happen by chance. It is the result of strong competent leadership, sound economic policies, and the deliberate choices we have made to protect the Jamaican people while safeguarding the stability of our economy. But, Madam Speaker, we know that we are mere servants of the Almighty and all good things come only from His blessings and grace. As 1 Corinthians 3:7 reminds us: "So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow."

## THE NEXT CHAPTER: PIVOT TO GROWTH

**Madam Speaker**, as we celebrate Jamaica's remarkable economic transformation and chart the next phase of our journey to economic Independence, we must take stock of where we stand.



The graph now being displayed shows GDP shown as Gross Value Added at constant prices since independence.

It shows that our most rapid period of economic growth was the decade immediately following independence. Economic growth averaged 6% per year in that decade. Since then we have had short periods of growth punctuated by declines and crises:

- We had the oil crisis and the socialist experiment of the 1970s that led to massive capital flight and exodus of skilled labour leading to a 20% fall in real GDP between 1974 and 1980. Madam Speaker, it took Jamaica until 1990 to get back to the level of output we had in 1973. That is 17 years!
- In the mid-1990s, we had the Jamaican financial sector meltdown and the FINSAC debacle. It took us 7 years until 2002, just to get back to the level of output that we had in 1995.
- Then in 2008, we had the Global Financial Crisis and it took us 11 years to recover from that.
- And soon after, we had the COVID-19 pandemic and the overlapping global supply chain and geopolitical crises. Madam Speaker, this was the biggest global health and economic crisis in 100 years, but the difference this time was that our recovery was V-shaped and we recovered in only three (3) years.

**Madam Speaker**, when you add up all those years, **Jamaica has spent 38 years out of our 62 years as an independent country recovering from crises. Let that sink in. Two of the four major crises that we faced were directly caused by bad economic management of the PNP in the 1970s and 1990s accounting for 24 of the 38 years of crises.**

Separate and apart from our debt recovery efforts, Jamaica has a new feature of its economy – resilience. My administration has focused on building fiscal buffers through provisioning the National Disaster Funds, maintaining high reserves, securing insurance and issuing catastrophe bonds. This is why we were able to recover quickly from the pandemic, other natural disasters, and geopolitical shocks. Before the pandemic, Jamaica recorded 20 consecutive quarters of economic expansion. After the pandemic-induced contraction, we rebounded with 13 consecutive quarters of growth. Over the last two quarters, we have had a temporary setback due to the impact of Hurricane Beryl and Tropical Storm Rafael, but we will quickly returned to growth.

We are certain that Jamaica will always experience shocks — with climate change and the growing global geopolitical uncertainties we observe that shocks are becoming more frequent, more intense, simultaneous, and overlapping. Jamaica must therefore be prepared for shocks, and importantly, we must not create any shocks by our own actions, as past PNP governments have done to Jamaica. Resilience is in our culture, “wi likkle but wi tallawah”! My administration has translated our spirit of “tallawahness” into our economy and government. We are resilient and that is wholly and solely a policy objective of my administration. Resilience is my pickney!

However, **Madam Speaker**, the reality is that, except for the decade immediately after Independence, our growth has remained anaemic and far below what is required to achieve our vision of shared prosperity, higher incomes, and an economy that generates opportunities for all.

The next chapter of Jamaica's economic journey must therefore be about accelerating growth, while maintaining fiscal and macroeconomic stability. Resilience is an important part of accelerating growth as without the capacity to withstand and adapt to shocks, recovery can be slow. Our increased resilience means that we are already on the path to faster growth, better equipped to navigate challenges and seize new opportunities.

**Madam Speaker**, in November 2024, I outlined the key pillars of the Government's growth strategy; ASPIRE:

- A - Access to Economic Opportunity for All (Inclusive Growth)**
- S - Safety and Security**
- P - People and our focus on Human Capital Development**
- I - Infrastructure Development**
- R - Reform of the Bureaucracy to Improve Ease, Speed and Cost of Doing Business**
- E - Economic Diversification**

### **The "A" in ASPIRE - Access to Economic Opportunity for All**

**Madam Speaker**, I must emphasise the first and most fundamental pillar of our growth strategy — access and inclusion.

Growth must be for all Jamaicans. True progress is not measured solely by GDP figures, but by how many lives are improved, how many doors are opened, and how many Jamaicans — regardless of background — have a fair shot at success.

**Madam Speaker**, I have said this before but let me say it again so that there is no room for misunderstanding and misinformation. This Government does not believe in "trickle-down" economics — the notion that if we simply grow the economy at the top, prosperity will somehow find its way to the rest of society. History has shown that growth must be deliberately structured to be inclusive. That is why our approach to economic expansion is people-centred and opportunity-driven. It is about broad-based empowerment, ensuring that growth fuels investment in education, skills training, small business development, and community infrastructure. It is about expanding opportunity and ensuring that no one is left behind.

This Government is systematically strengthening our social protection framework, expanding opportunities, and breaking the cycle of generational poverty. We are not just talking about it — we are taking decisive action:

- In 2021, we introduced Jamaica's first-ever Social Pension, providing a guaranteed income for 15,000 vulnerable Jamaicans aged 75 and older, ensuring they can live with dignity in their golden years.
- We have ramped up investment in the New Social Housing Programme which provides safe and secure housing for the country's most vulnerable. Over 300 homes have already been built and handed over or are under construction, transforming lives and communities.

- In 2022, we implemented the Tourism Workers Pension Scheme making Jamaica the first country in the world to implement a comprehensive pension plan for tourism workers, ensuring that those who built our top-earning industry can retire with financial security.
- In 2024, we launched the Jamaica Entertainers and Creatives Insurance Plan to protect our artists, musicians, and creative; recognizing their vital contribution to our culture and economy.
- We increased funding for the Programme of Advancement Through Health and Education (PATH) by 30% in 2024, providing more support for thousands of vulnerable families.
- We are actively working on introducing unemployment insurance, a critical reform that will provide financial relief to Jamaicans who face sudden job loss.

## **Breaking the Cycle of Generational Poverty**

**Madam Speaker**, while strengthening our social safety net is crucial, we must go further. It is not enough to support people in times of hardship — we must create pathways out of poverty.

Last year, I announced the HOPE for Children Trust Fund, a groundbreaking initiative. The reality is that thousands of children in low-income families reach adulthood without any savings or assets to help them get a start in life. This lack of capital perpetuates generational poverty. We must break this cycle.

Through this HOPE for Children Trust Fund, every eligible child will be provided with a long-term savings account, funded annually by the Government. The funds will accumulate with interest and will be accessible on or after the child's 18th birthday for transformative purposes such as: education and skills training, home or commercial property ownership, or business investment.

The central idea behind this programme is to equip young Jamaicans with a financial foundation — a lump sum that gives them a real start in life.

**Madam Speaker**, any Jamaican child born on or after our 60th anniversary of Independence (August 6, 2022), who is part of a PATH household or a Ward of the State, will be eligible to register under the programme.

**Madam Speaker**, we are making progress with determining the legal structure of the fund and examining options for how the fund will be managed and administered, and I am pleased to report that during the upcoming financial year, the Government will seed the fund with \$200 million.

## **Wealth Creation**

**Madam Speaker**, this Government has pursued a deliberate strategy of **socialising wealth by enabling Jamaicans to own shares in key national infrastructure assets through the stock market — literally paying dividends to the people**. This approach democratises economic opportunities, allowing citizens to benefit directly from state-owned enterprises transitioning to public ownership. In May 2019, we divested **Wigton Windfarm** and in March 2020, we divested 80% of **TransJamaican Highway Limited**. Tens of thousands of small investors have benefitted from dividend income and capital gains through

ownership of these shares, **aligning national development with wealth creation and broad-based economic empowerment for the people.** Unlike the PNP who socialised debt, while transferring wealth from the poor to the rich during the FINSAC era! **Madam Speaker,** I am pleased to report that the offer for sale for the remaining 20% of the shares of Transjamaican Highway has been **oversubscribed with over 22,000 applications totalling over J\$12 billion.**

**Madam Speaker, this is a vote of confidence in Jamaica.** These investors know that **Jamaica today has the strongest economy since Independence.** This is not rhetoric. This is not an opinion. This is an undeniable fact — backed by empirical data on inflation, unemployment, exchange rate, balance of payments, Net International Reserves, debt-to-GDP, and poverty reduction.

**Madam Speaker,** creating wealth and making it accessible to all is the DNA of this JLP administration and this is how we will accelerate growth. There are several other assets that the Government is preparing to bring to market so that ordinary Jamaicans can participate and share in the value they create when paired with private sector enterprise and innovation. At this stage I can announce that the Jamaica Mortgage Bank is being prepared to come to market.

### The “S” in ASPIRE - Safety and Security

**Madam Speaker,** there can be no real economic growth, no true inclusion, without security. For too long, violent crime has cast a shadow over our progress, stealing the potential of young lives and holding back our full economic transformation. Thankfully, we can now say the tide is turning. Jamaica is taking decisive action against violence producers, and the results are now evident.



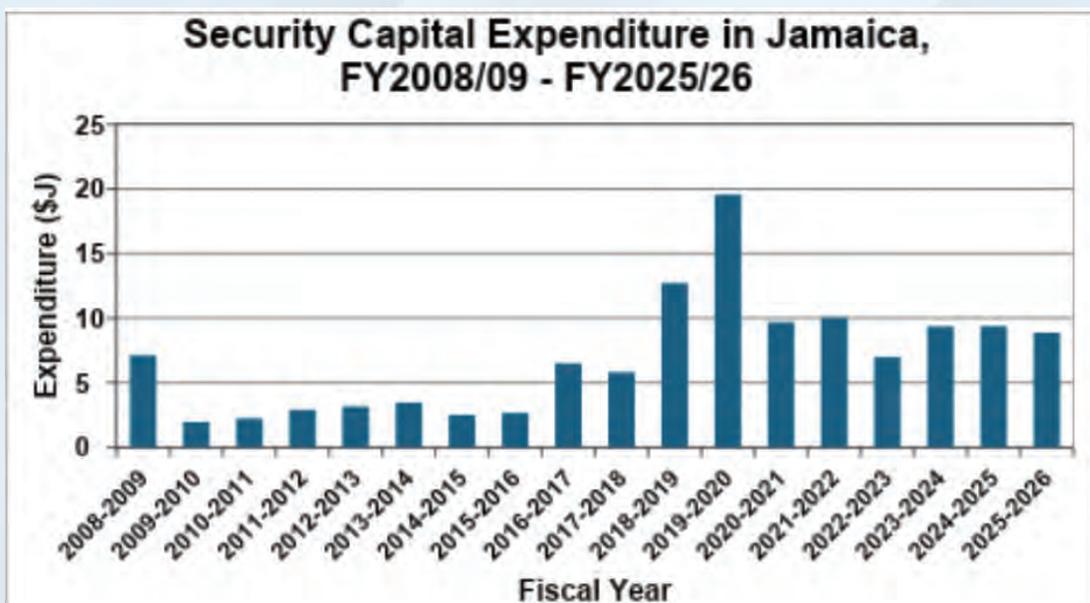
**Madam Speaker**, in 2024, Jamaica recorded a 19% reduction in murders, following a 7% decline in 2023, bringing our homicide rate to 40.1 per 100,000. While still high, we are now outperforming some regional peers — a stark contrast to 2016 when Jamaica had the highest rate in the Caribbean at 50 per 100,000. Unlike much of the region, where homicide rates are currently surging past ours, we have reversed the trend, and now other countries are studying our approach to reducing violence.

Notably, **Madam Speaker**, the 2024 Christmas season was the safest in over 20 years, with just six murders recorded during Christmas week. Since November 2024, the country has seen a sustained decline in murders, culminating in 47 murders in February 2025 — the lowest monthly total in 25 years and a 43% reduction compared to February 2024. Between February 2022 and February 2025, murders have declined by 55%.

Additionally, major crimes as a whole, including murder, shootings, rape, robbery, and break-ins, have declined by 21%, reaching the lowest level since disaggregated data collection began in 1999. Jamaica is now safer than at any point in the last 20 years.

**Madam Speaker**, on our current trajectory, Jamaica is on track to record fewer than 1,000 murders in a single year for the first time since 2003. We are confident that this downward trajectory will persist, as these results stem from our deliberate planning, strategic investments, and targeted efforts to dismantle organised criminal gangs.

My Government has recognised violence as a national emergency and, as such, we have made the largest sustained investment in national security in Jamaica’s history. In 2015, before my administration took office, capital expenditure for national security was \$2.67 billion. By 2018, we increased it to \$12.7 billion, and in 2019, we made a record \$19.5 billion investment to modernise our security apparatus. This substantial increase in our first term was necessary to compensate for the years of underinvestment.



These funds have strengthened our security forces through investments in equipment, vehicles, intelligence, forensic technology, and advanced training in cybercrime, counter-trafficking, and financial intelligence. We have enhanced the operational capacity of the Jamaica Constabulary Force and Jamaica Defence Force, rearming them with modern tools to dismantle criminal networks.

In the case of the JCF, we have invested in building one of the most advanced law enforcement agencies in the Hemisphere. To this end, significant progress is being made on the development of a C5 Centre — a state-of-the-art command and control facility.

This cutting-edge centre will seamlessly integrate, coordinate, and analyse real-time data from all available sources, including CCTV and body-worn cameras, supported by a robust back-end infrastructure. This development is a game-changer for modern, efficient, and intelligence-driven policing and will have a major impact on crime.

The Government's Project ROC Initiative, which was launched in 2019 to modernise the physical infrastructure of the JCF, has seen the refurbishment and construction of numerous police facilities across the island.

Through the Public Sector Compensation Review, my Government has ensured that our police officers are now in receipt of more reasonable salaries and pensions, befitting of their profession, and provides a better foundation for future negotiations. The resulting boost to morale cannot be overstated, and it has made a career in the JCF more appealing.

For the first time in the history of the force, the establishment strength of 14,000 officers has been met. More police officers and more vehicles mean greater coverage of our communities and more rapid response to threats and citizens' emergencies.

Since 2021, the purchase of vehicles and the build-out of the JamaicaEye CCTV system have been transferred to the Capitalised Recurrent Budget, to ensure continuous replenishment.

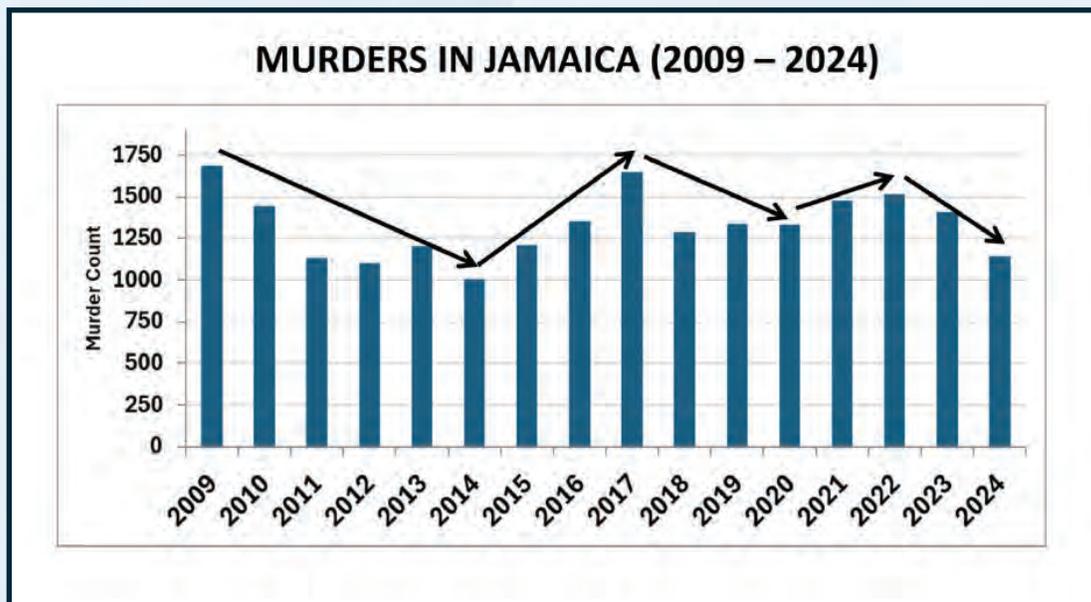
**Madam Speaker**, the role of the JDF in the overall reduction in violent crime, through their support to the JCF is crucial, particularly in areas where specialised security measures have been declared (Zones of Special Operations and States of Emergency).

The JDF is the premier defence force in CARICOM, notably leading the planning and preparation of the CARICOM Joint Task Force to Haiti since September 2024 and executing multi-country military exercises, enhancing interoperability in cybersecurity, counter-narcotics, search and rescue, and disaster relief.

**Madam Speaker**, our borders are more secure than ever due in large part to the new offshore patrol vessels, helicopters, maritime patrol aircraft, and other technical equipment we procured for the JDF. They are now better equipped to interdict illicit vessels and aircraft trafficking weapons, narcotics, and people. This fiscal year, we will further enhance maritime security with the addition of 24 surface interceptor vessels, strengthening the protection of our border and our blue economy.

However, **Madam Speaker**, we note that most illicit weapons, which fuel gang violence, enter Jamaica through formal ports of entry. To improve our ability to secure this channel, we have been investing in advanced scanners and enhanced security protocols at Jamaica Customs, and the result is evidenced by major gun finds at our ports in recent times. I would like to acknowledge Jamaica Customs for their increased vigilance, and generally commend the security forces and our partners for increased cooperation and intelligence sharing which is yielding great results. Every weapon and ammunition kept off our street is potentially a life saved. Additionally, we are finalising the Customs Mutual Assistance Agreement with the United States, which will enable even greater intelligence sharing to strengthen port security and protect our national and economic interests.

**Madam Speaker**, data and intelligence confirm that Jamaica's chronic violence is driven by organised criminal enterprises — euphemistically called gangs, not socio-economic factors like poverty or unemployment, as the Opposition would have us believe. More than 70% of murders in Jamaica are directly related to gangs.



**Madam Speaker**, let us recall that the drop in murders from 2009 to 2014, for which the Opposition seeks to take credit, was a direct result of the SOEs launched in May 2010 by the Jamaica Labour Party Administration, which dismantled and scattered the gangs and created a 21% drop in murders in 2011 and stabilisation in 2012. This created a respite where targeted police operations against gangs and violence producers resulted in 2014 having the lowest number of murders in the last 20 years. In mid 2014, the PNP introduced the Unite For Change, an ostensible crime-fighting strategy that leaned heavily on social interventions. There was also a change of police commissioners, and an apparent change in crime fighting strategy. By 2015 murders began to rise again, even with the much touted Unite for Change initiative in full effect.

The truth, **Madam Speaker**, is that the PNP shifted focus from the targeted operations against gangs and gang leaders, and allowed them space to regroup. The number of gangs in the country increased from under 200 in 2010 to 350 by 2016, and we saw their impact from 2015 through to 2017. That is when my administration decided to take decisive action. We recognised the emergency threat organised criminal enterprises and violence producers posed to specific communities and the country generally. We responded with Zones of Special Operations and States of Public Emergencies to halt the persistent spiral in murders from 2015 to 2017. The SOEs and ZOSOs were successful in taking back communities from gangs, displacing criminals, disrupting their operations and limiting their space and opportunity to commit crimes. This resulted in a 22% reduction in murders in 2018 and a leveling off between 2019 and 2020. The success of the SOEs and the ZOSOs came with the support of the Opposition at the time, and here I must give credit to the former Leader of the Opposition and former Minister of National Security, Dr. Peter Philips, who understood their necessity and supported their extensions. However, since the change in leadership in the Opposition in 2020, we have not been able to use the SOEs to full effect, and we saw a 10% spike in murders in 2021. This could have been prevented and lives saved if narrow political interest parading as “protecting rights” did not blind the current Opposition Leader to protecting the right to life of the victims of murder by supporting extensions of the SOEs.

**Madam Speaker**, in parallel with emergency measures, this administration, in 2018, embarked on an ambitious plan to indigenously reform and reorganise the JCF under the direction of a new Commissioner, Antony Anderson, to include development of leadership, recruitment and training of personnel, and the acquisition of materiel and technology. It was never the intention of the Government to rely solely on emergency measures. We used emergency measures to treat the crime situation which is over and above the existing capacity of regular law enforcement, and we use the space and attenuation it creates to build the capacity of our security forces. Therefore in 2022, we began to realise the impact of the reforms and capacity-building investments in the JCF, with improved intelligence gathering, better investigative and crime solving capabilities, and a return to more targeted and focused strategies on gangs and violence producers. During this period we saw the interdiction and prosecution of several gangs and gang leaders using the anti-gang legislation. And today, we can say that, year-to-date, murders are at their lowest level in 25 years. Had we had the support of the Opposition in the use of SOEs, the fall in murders would have been much greater.

Let me be clear, the PNP under this Leader of the Opposition can take no credit for the reduction in murders. They have done everything possible to obstruct the Government.

**Madam Speaker**, we will continue to invest in the security forces and support the transformation of the JCF into a modern, professional and technology-driven security force. We will continue to target gangs, which account for over 70% of murders in the country. If we focus on eliminating gangs we can reduce our murder rate to below the regional average of 15 per hundred thousand. And I am pleased to announce, **Madam Speaker**, that police intelligence now estimates fewer than 100 gangs active in Jamaica since the beginning of the year, coming from a high of 350 in 2016. Many have been dismantled, or have gone dormant. They are laying low because they know they are being hunted relentlessly by the security forces.

**Madam Speaker**, this administration takes National Security seriously, and through the National Security Council we have been able to coordinate, enhance and strengthen the work and collaborative efforts of our various security forces to yield greater synergies from our security forces and resources. And I would like to acknowledge, thank, and encourage the members of our security forces through their respective heads, Chief of Defence Staff of the JDF Vice Admiral Antonette Wemyss Gorman, CD, Commissioner of Police Dr. Kevin Blake, CD, Director General of MOCA Col. Desmond Edwards, and Commissioner of Customs, Dr. Velma Ricketts Walker, CD. With continued concerted effort we can eliminate the gangs and violence producers and achieve peace in Jamaica.

## **The “P” in ASPIRE - People and our focus on Human Capital Development**

**Madam Speaker**, Jamaica’s greatest asset is our people. That is why this Government continues to invest in education, training, and job opportunities — ensuring that every Jamaican, regardless of background, has the chance to learn, earn, and thrive.

Through programmes such as **LIFT (Learning and Investment for Transformation)** and **CARE (Community Action for Rewarding Engagement)**, we are directly supporting young Jamaicans on their journey to skill development and employment. The second cohort of LIFT is underway, providing education, mentorship, and work experience for youth who need a start. Also, over 1,250 unattached youth across all 63 constituencies are now enrolled in training under CARE, receiving stipends and transportation support to remove financial barriers.

**Madam Speaker**, these programmes transform lives. A school leaver from an inner-city community or a rural parish can now access training and have a real pathway to a career.

HEART touches lives every day. Today I have Akon Pitt and Gary Smith with us. Akon was unsure about his next steps after his stellar CSEC results. At the behest of his Member of Parliament, Akon was a participant in the first cohort of the LIFT programme. After training, he was placed and paid at CARIMED where he had an exceptional journey. Akon is now at the JCIA (Jamaica Cooperative Insurance Agency).

Gary is a 20-year-old pursuing a Business Administration Level 2 certification as an on-the-job trainee at Coleyville Trading Ltd. under the CARE Programme. He dreams of becoming a Certified Engineering Contractor and establishing his own air conditioning repair business. Despite his difficulties, Gary is now closer to realising his dream.

These are both young men that the Government has empowered through the HEART/ NSTA Trust. Madam Speaker, Akon and Gary are from the community of Gregory Park in Minister Terrelonge’s constituency in the soon-to-be parish of Portmore. There are hundreds of thousands of Akons and Garys that we have empowered through skills training since 2020 — 552,534 to be exact.

**Madam Speaker**, since the elimination of fees, over 150,000 persons have signed up for the various programmes at HEART.

## Apprenticeships for High-Demand Industries

**Madam Speaker**, we have already had significant success in public-private partnerships and the apprenticeship model with the Amber HEART Academy. Nearly 500 youths have graduated specialising in Data Analytics, Cyber Security, Web and Mobile app development. Most have secured paid internships with career pathways. One hundred and twelve (112) JDF soldiers are also now being trained in coding, which will strengthen the JDF's technological capabilities.

**Madam Speaker**, building on the success of this model, I am pleased to announce an **Expanded Apprenticeship Programme in critical industries** that urgently need more skilled labour. These industries includes construction and hospitality sectors. Over the next two years, 300 young people will receive paid, hands-on training alongside industry professionals. **Each participant will earn a weekly stipend of \$13,500 - \$16,500, with 10% set aside as compulsory savings.** This approach allows our youth to build a career, support their families, and contribute to the economy all at the same time.

**Madam Speaker**, we will begin this pilot in conjunction with the Sandals Corporate University.

Additionally, later this year, we will establish the **Institute of Higher Apprenticeships** in partnership with industry and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). This will provide advanced vocational certification while participants work in the field. A young person will be able to pursue, say, a logistics degree or diploma in manufacturing, through an apprenticeship track gaining academic credentials and practical experience at the same time. Upon graduating, they will be ready to take on higher-paying jobs.

## Preparing Students for the Future: STEAM Labs and STEM Talent Development

**Madam Speaker**, the jobs of tomorrow demand skills in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM). To prepare our students, HEART is investing \$400 million to establish state-of-the-art STEAM labs in technical high schools across the island. These labs will feature robotics kits, virtual welding simulators, drone technology, hydroponic stations, and 3D printers — ensuring that children from all backgrounds can access world-class technical education.

To further support STEM talent, we are launching the BOOST (Building Opportunities for Outstanding STEM Talent) Programme. Beginning in April 2025, HEART graduates in Level 4 STEM-related courses will be eligible for grants of up to \$300,000 to purchase specialised tools, software, or start a business.

## Preparing Jamaica for the AI Revolution

**Madam Speaker**, AI is reshaping industries worldwide. When the First Industrial revolution started Jamaica was still a colony. When the Information Age started Jamaica was still trying to industrialise. We are now moving to the Fifth Industrial Revolution and Jamaica cannot afford to be left behind. Technology provides the ability to leapfrog and we must position ourselves to do so. I have given directives to the Minister of Education to ensure that AI is prominent in our national training and development strategy, which is why we appointed an AI Task Force. This Government is committed to ensuring Jamaica is an active player, not a spectator, in the global AI revolution.

Following the recommendations of the National Artificial Intelligence Task Force, we are implementing an AI Workforce Readiness Strategy. This includes:

- **Integrating AI and coding into school curricula at all levels** and promoting dedicated teacher training programmes on AI.
- Launching a **Prompt Engineering course** through HEART/NSTA Trust to train students and Public Sector professionals in using AI tools effectively.

**Madam Speaker**, in partnership with the Amber Group, the Government will also establish a **cutting-edge local AI Lab** – a public-private centre of excellence where developers, researchers, entrepreneurs and students can collaborate on AI solutions. This AI Lab will serve as the catalyst for a new era of technological advancement in Jamaica.

**Madam Speaker**, AI will disrupt some traditional jobs, but it will also create new, high-paying opportunities. This Government is ensuring Jamaicans are equipped to seize those opportunities and lead in the digital economy.

### **Technology-Driven Learning: The Jamaica Learning Assistant Platform**

**Madam Speaker**, we will also be using AI tools to help our children learn.

We are developing the Jamaica Learning Assistant (JLA) — a groundbreaking AI-powered platform designed to revolutionise learning with end-to-end AI-generated and curated content, fully aligned with the national curriculum.

Let me give you a preview:

[1 minute demo]

The JLA will adapt lessons to each student's unique learning style — whether they understand concepts through detailed explanations, humour, poems, mind maps, AI-generated animated story-based visuals, interactive Q&As, quizzes, or even by conversing with a human-like AI tutor. With the JLA, every child in Jamaica will have access to personalised learning 24/7 at their own pace, both in and out of the classroom.

**Madam Speaker**, this transformation is not just for students. The JLA will also be a game-changer for our teachers — dramatically reducing the time spent on lesson planning and grading, allowing them to focus on what truly matters: inspiring, mentoring, and shaping young minds. A phased rollout will begin in September 2025 with Grade 3 and Grade 9 cohorts.

My administration understands the power of Artificial Intelligence and we intend to harness it for national development.

## Phased Introduction of the National Rural School Bus System

**Madam Speaker**, starting September 2025, we will implement a dedicated school bus system for rural Jamaica to ensure equitable access, improved attendance, and enhanced safety while easing financial burdens on families. This will be rolled out in phases.

Phase 1 is already underway, with the JUTC expanding services in Clarendon, Morant Bay, and Linstead, providing affordable transport for students. We will add 12 additional 45-seater buses to the already existing fleet of 10 buses giving the Montego Bay area a total of 22 buses.



Phase 2 will see 100 fully refurbished buses deployed across parishes, with 60 buses in September 2025 for the start of the new school and another 40 by January 2026.

**Madam Speaker**, this marks a transformative step in making school transportation safer, more reliable, and more affordable for Jamaica's students.

## Health

**Madam Speaker**, in the public discourse around human capital, there is a tendency to overlook the vital role of public health. A healthy society is a productive society, and so the reverse is also true.

**Madam Speaker**, I try not to speak too much on my Ministers' portfolios, but I could not let some accusations from the Opposition Leader go unanswered.

**Madam Speaker**, it is clear that the Opposition Leader forgot what his government left behind in 2016 in healthcare — a system described by his spokesperson on health as so broken down that surgeons



The map now being displayed shows work completed in this fiscal year (2024/25) shown in green and upcoming projects for which procurement is in progress in white.

**Madam Speaker**, we do not only announce, we deliver and we are now breaking ground and commissioning water supply systems on almost a weekly basis. A proper account of the extensive work undertaken in every constituency would require us to be here all night. I can assure you that work is being done in every constituency and the details will be provided by Minister Matthew Samuda who is now a Member of this Honourable House. **Madam Speaker**, Minister Samuda will also provide a comprehensive update on environment and climate change.

However I would like to make mention of a few areas under water.

### ***Western Parishes Water Supply and Resilience Improvement Programme***

**Madam Speaker**, the severe drought which affected Western Jamaica disproportionately, prompted the acceleration of major capital works to replace transmission mains in the parishes of Trelawny, St James, Hanover, and Westmoreland. This J\$28 billion 3-year project will commence in May 2025 and reduce water insecurity and non-revenue water and involves upgrading 28 km of the transmission main from St. James to Trelawny and 37.5 km from Lucea to Negril. On completion, it will benefit over 250,000 residential and business customers and catalyse development in key sectors.

### ***CDB Funded Rural Water Projects***

**Madam Speaker**, six (6) major projects funded by the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) are being undertaken by Rural Water Supply Limited which will significantly improve access and transform the lives of more than Thirty Eight Thousand (38,000) Jamaicans in rural areas of Southeast and Western St. Mary, Southern Trelawny, Northeast St. Elizabeth, Eastern St. Thomas and Northwest St. Ann. Currently, RWSL and CDB are finalising the necessary documentation for procuring design services, with the advertisement expected to be published by March 31, 2025.

### ***Greater Mandeville Water Supply Improvement Project***

**Madam Speaker**, the Greater Mandeville Water Supply Improvement Project is being undertaken at a cost of J\$2.7 billion and is midway in its five-year scope. This project will reduce Non-Revenue Water to below 50%, increase service reliability and quality of service given to customers and facilitate planned residential (in particular NHT developments) and commercial developments.

### ***Rio Cobre Water Treatment Plant***

This Rio Cobre Water Treatment Plant project has been discussed for a number of years. I am pleased to report that it has finally entered the construction phase and we are targeting completion for the end of 2026.

**Madam Speaker**, during the worst drought Jamaica ever experienced in 2022, Kingston & St. Andrew and Portmore were short 12 million gallons daily. With the provision of 15 million gallons daily, this project will ensure adequate supply during droughts for Kingston & St. Andrew, Portmore and St. Catherine.

**Madam Speaker**, I want to acknowledge the role of the IDB Invest, and PROPARCO who have supported local investors in making this project a reality.

### ***Expansion of Sewer Network***

**Madam Speaker**, the expansion of the sewer network in Kingston and St. Andrew is critical to the future development within the parish, both to facilitate greater densities, and safeguard ground water. This year, the NWC will be investing J\$1.4 billion into the laying of sewer lines along Monroe Road, Retreat Avenue, Seymour Avenue, and Old Hope Road.

Additionally, there are two areas of deep concern which must be addressed forthwith. The first is the situation in Downtown Kingston, with collapsing sewer mains. An overhaul of the entire potable water, sewerage and drainage networks is required for most of Central and West Kingston. I have directed Minister Samuda to ensure that project design for this massive infrastructure need is completed this year. I have further directed that J\$450 million be immediately deployed to the worst affected areas within the market district to provide immediate relief. The NWC has also commenced procurement of an additional “Hi Vac Truck” to be stationed in Downtown Kingston to ensure blockages are dealt with immediately. **Madam Speaker**, the infrastructure is old and the investment has been inadequate.

The second situation relates to the Greater Portmore Treatment Plant and sewerage lines in Edgewater and Portsmouth communities. **Madam Speaker**, the NWC upgraded the Eastern section of the Greater Portmore Treatment Plan at a cost of J\$900 million. A similar upgrade is required for the Western section of the plant, and that will be undertaken next year. However, in the interim, the NWC will install two new pumps to cut overflows, increase maintenance and install perimeter fencing to stop the illegal access of cesspool trucks.

### ***National Drought Mitigation Programme (Black Tank Programme)***

**Madam Speaker**, members will recall my announcement of 50,000 tanks to be distributed under the National Drought Mitigation Programme. I am happy to report that contracts have been awarded for the supply and distribution of 7,500 of these tanks, with another 2,500 currently being procured.

### ***NWC Amnesty***

**Madam Speaker**, in November 2024, I announced that the NWC would provide an amnesty to customers cut off from the utility for more than six months. This amnesty has benefitted pensioners, PATH recipients, and members of the disabled community with up to a 100% reprieve, and up to 50% for other categories of customers.



As at March 14, 2025, over 21,000 customers had engaged in the process. Total reconnections so far total 3,271, with a further 5,135 awaiting reconnections. This has yielded over J\$207 million in revenue collected for the NWC that would have been uncollectible otherwise. We have also written off over J\$600 million of debt from those who most needed it, restoring the supply of water and returning dignity to households.

**Madam Speaker**, this programme is helping our most vulnerable. As such I have instructed the National Water Commission to extend the programme for a further two months.

## **Roads**

**Madam Speaker**, a strong road network is vital to a thriving economy. This Government has taken bold steps to modernise our roads, enhance resilience, and ensure sustainability.

**Madam Speaker**, the **Southern Coastal Highway Improvement Project** is now 95% complete. The remaining segments, from Yallahs Bridge to Port Antonio and Morant Bay to Cedar Valley, will reach completion by June 2025. This transformative project has delivered 141 km of reconstructed roads, 248 km of waterlines, and 140 km of fibre-optic ducts, significantly enhancing connectivity and essential utilities.

The launch of the **J\$45 billion SPARK (Shared Prosperity through Accelerated Improvement to our Road Network)** Project marked another pivotal achievement for our roads and water supply infrastructure. For the first time, all constituencies had an opportunity to provide input. As I had committed, construction work began before the end of 2024 with the rehabilitation of Everest Drive in Harbour View. Since then, work orders have been issued covering 126 roads across all 63 constituencies. Within the next six (6) weeks, we have programmed for construction to begin on another 126 roads, representing the largest single event of road construction in the history of independent Jamaica. That is 252 community roads to be completed by October of this year.

The **Special CAPEX Programme** represents a strategic push to modernize our urban infrastructure, integrating road, drainage, sewerage, and broadband upgrades to enhance safety and traffic management. Under this programme, Grange Lane is 90% complete, with the next major project being the dualisation of Braeton Road and sections of the Hellshire Main Road, at a cost of \$2.4 billion. Other projects include the Arthur Wint Drive Extension and we have expanded the original scope to include the stretch from Arthur Wint Drive to Tom Redcam and Camp Road, incorporating sewerage and additional water infrastructure, ensuring greater benefits for residents, businesses, and future developments. Several additional CAPEX projects including the Arthur Wint Drive Extension are scheduled to begin in the upcoming fiscal year.

**Madam Speaker**, the Government will invest \$2 billion to **enhance key entrance corridors leading into the capital city, Kingston, creating a more attractive and welcoming gateway**. This initiative will focus on major thoroughfares, including the airport road from Norman Manley International Airport to Mountain View, from the roundabout to Port Royal, as well as Six Miles to Dunrobin Avenue and Six Miles to Portia

Simpson Miller Square through to downtown via Spanish Town Road. The project will begin with pre-investment works, including design planning and community consultations. These upgrades will not only beautify Kingston's entry points but also enhance infrastructure, improve connectivity, and create a positive first impression for visitors and residents alike.

**Bypass road projects** in Port Maria, Santa Cruz, Lucea, Annotto Bay, and Hopewell/Sandy Bay continue in the planning and development phase. The Port Antonio Bypass is set to begin in the new fiscal year following a completion of a feasibility study.

Other priority projects include:

1. Spanish Town Road (Six Miles to Darling Street)
2. Washington Boulevard (Six Miles to Molyne's Road)
3. Dunrobin Avenue Extension to East Kings House Road (Overpass of Constant Spring Road)
4. Red Hills Road (Dunrobin Ave to Perkins Boulevard)
5. Molyne's Road (Eastwood Park Rd to Washington Boulevard)
6. Old Hope Road
7. Braeton Parkway

These strategic initiatives are the result of years of planning and are now being executed to position Jamaica for sustained economic growth, improved public services, and greater resilience to future challenges.

**Madam Speaker**, under the **Accelerated Bridge Renewal and Priority Bridge Programmes** we are upgrading or replacing over 55 critical bridges. Work on the Craig Mill Bridge in Portland is set to begin early in the new fiscal year. As part of the project, a pedestrian bridge will first be constructed to restore foot traffic for the community while the main replacement bridge is built. The Troy Bridge, is now approximately 50% complete. Other key projects include the Spring Village Bridge in St. Catherine and Alley Bridge in Clarendon. New bridges under development include Barham (Westmoreland), Southwood (Clarendon), and Guanaboa Vale (St. Catherine). The Guanaboa Vale Bridge is critical as it provides an alternative route to Flat Bridge, when it floods.

## **Toll Roads**

**Madam Speaker**, let me now speak on our toll road infrastructure which is a critical aspect of our improved connectivity, productivity and efficiency. We know that long wait times at toll plazas can cause costly delays, frustration, and impact the nation's productivity. The **Angels Toll Plaza** is one of the busiest on our network, and I am pleased to announce that three additional lanes will be added. Engineering designs for these are far advanced.

A longer-term more transformative change will be the introduction of Open Road Tolling, a state-of-the-art system that allows vehicles to be charged electronically without having to stop at a toll booth. This system is widely used across the world and has proven to be faster, more efficient, and more convenient. The Montego Bay Perimeter Road will serve as the pilot project for this initiative.

**Madam Speaker**, members would recall that the **Montego Bay Perimeter Road Project** includes the Montego Bay Bypass, the Long Hill Bypass, and critical upgrades to Barnett Street and West Green Avenue.

For residents in the Long Hill area, you would have already noticed that clearing works have commenced. The initial concept of the Long Hill Bypass considered a two-lane roadway. However, the Government has taken a strategic decision to expand the roadway to four lanes.

Additionally, works on the Montego Bay Bypass are progressing rapidly with earthworks at a very advanced stage, and the Montego River Bridge now 95% complete.

As of today, the overall project stands at approximately 55% complete. Once finished, this network of roads will significantly ease the longstanding traffic challenges in Montego Bay and open up new areas for development, fostering greater investment and economic activity.

**Madam Speaker**, Jamaica's North Coast is booming. The Mammee area has emerged as a new urban corridor between Ocho Rios and St. Ann's Bay. It is also a critical tourism corridor, and in recent times it has become an area for residential communities. Effectively the corridor, which is supposed to be part of the North Coast Highway, is now serving as the main boulevard of a town, with several ingress and egress from local roads. The corridor now handles traffic coming to and from the North South toll road, traffic moving between Ocho Rios and St. Ann's Bay, and local traffic moving within the various businesses and residences along the corridor. This has created a significant traffic hazard for residents and commuters, which will stifle the natural development energy of this area.

This situation would be further complicated if we should proceed to widen and improve the existing roadway without having an alternative in place as there are no other viable alternatives. We have learned our lessons from the SCHIP which created significant dislocation to residents and motorists, as we fixed the road while using it. The dislocation and risks to residents, businesses and the Government would be far more costly in this case.

While we are currently engaged in the North Coast Highway PPP project to design and build out the upgrades particularly the Mammee Bay section of the road, the Government has decided to also pursue the extension of the North-South Toll Road which will begin with a clover-leaf interchange at Mammee Bay, extending westward to Discovery Bay (Phase 1A) and eastward to Prospect, St. Mary (Phase 1B). The project is estimated to cost approximately US\$350 million.

Given the urgency of the development and the dislocation risks involved in upgrading the existing roadway, the Government of Jamaica will take steps to designate the North-South Highway Extension as a National Development Project.

**Madam Speaker**, planning and development are underway for the Lucea/Hopewell Bypass, which will improve connectivity and ease congestion along the North Coast. This new 27-kilometre, four-lane rural arterial roadway will begin near Reading, St. James, and extend westward through Hanover, ultimately

terminating near the town of Lucea. To further enhance traffic flow, the project will include strategically placed link roads connecting the bypass to the North Coast Highway, allowing motorists to seamlessly navigate around Lucea and Hopewell, which will also reduce congestion in those towns.

## **Strategic Review of Road Maintenance**

**Madam Speaker**, for decades road maintenance in Jamaica has suffered from issues of fragmented responsibility among the NWA, local municipal corporations, and the Ministry of Agriculture as well as inadequate preventive maintenance. For years, multiple agencies have been responsible for different aspects of road upkeep, leading to inefficiencies, gaps in accountability, and inconsistent standards. Additionally, a lack of structured, preventive maintenance has resulted in roads deteriorating faster than they should, increasing the burden of costly emergency repairs. This reactive approach is neither sustainable nor cost-effective.

We are therefore undertaking a Strategic Road Maintenance Review, with a focus on:

- Institutional and Governance arrangements - to give consideration to the possible establishment of a Single Roads Authority to streamline governance and oversight. With this in place we can have clear lines of enforcement against persons who destroy our roads. It is particularly disturbing to see concrete spilled on our roads and no accountability for clearing and restoration.
- Sustainable funding arrangements.
- Contracting Arrangements - including implementing long-term performance-based contracts for maintenance and upkeep.

I want to express my gratitude to the World Bank and the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office for providing technical assistance with this review including information on approaches and models for road maintenance that have been successful in other countries.

**Madam Speaker**, we are also integrating geospatial technologies and AI-driven solutions to improve planning and efficiency. We have significantly mapped and referenced over 90% of all roads in Jamaica. This information will help us to have an intelligence register of all our roads to use in spatial planning and importantly in developing a fiscal preventative maintenance plan which aligns to the engineered life span of the road. This also lays the basis for smarter and connected infrastructure to address traffic, public safety, civil defence, security and logistics. To this end I have given directions to the NWA and Spatial Data Management Branch to begin work on developing a uniformed address and ZIP code system for Jamaica, including the use of digital addresses.

**Madam Speaker**, after decades of underinvestment, we are shifting to a structured, sustainable, tech-enabled system of road maintenance. This approach will extend road lifespan, reduce frequent repairs, and improve safety. This Government is not just rebuilding roads; we are building a smarter, more resilient future for Jamaica.

## Housing and Urban Renewal

**Madam Speaker**, approximately 20 per cent of Jamaicans live in informal settlements, but in urban areas, the situation is even more dire — about 60 percent of the urban population reside in unplanned, substandard housing, a higher proportion than nearly every other country in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Decades of rapid urbanisation have outpaced proper planning, significant number of Jamaicans unable to leverage land as an asset, access credit, or receive essential public services. Beyond poor living conditions, these areas often become breeding grounds for gangs, threatening national security and economic progress.

**Madam Speaker**, we are committed to transforming informal settlements into secure, legally recognised communities that foster stability, economic empowerment, and a better quality of life for all Jamaicans.

**Madam Speaker**, in 2007, a JLP government restructured the failed Operation PRIDE into the Housing Agency of Jamaica (HAJ), making it the leading force in tenure regularisation. The HAJ continues to prioritise security of tenure for low- and middle-income earners, delivering approximately 1,000 homes across projects such as St. Paul’s Lane (Kingston), Catherine Estates (St. Catherine), Sandown Palms (St. Catherine), and Edmund Ridge (St. James).

Additionally, the HAJ has been tasked with upgrading 81 informal communities, with work set to begin in Eden Park (St. Mary). To expand home ownership, the HAJ plans to implement 10,000 housing starts and 4,000 completed solutions over the next four years. The HAJ will also be intervening in five (5) small informal urban communities (5 acres or less) to upgrade their housing and infrastructure, replicating the successful St. Paul’s Lane model. We have identified Allman Town, Annotto Bay, Parade Gardens, Long Acres, Montego Bay, and Russia in Savanna-La-Mar, as communities to benefit from this intervention.

The HAJ’s Land Titling Initiative has also made significant progress, with 230 titles issued this financial year. However, **Madam Speaker**, the HAJ is just one part of our broader land regularisation strategy.

NUMBER OF TITLES ISSUED IN 15 YEARS			NUMBER OF TITLES ISSUED IN 4 YEARS			
	Financial Year	Ad Hoc Titles	Financial Year	Systematic Titles	Ad Hoc Titles	Total
1.	2006/2007	27	1.	2021/2022	4,225	1,785
2.	2007/2008	208	2.	2022/2023	3,032	1,646
3.	2008/2009	217	3.	2023/2024	2,126	1,344
4.	2009/2010	871	4.	2024/2025	2,617	1,629
5.	2010/2011	1,019		TOTAL	12,000	6,404
6.	2011/2012	994				18,404
7.	2012/2013	804				
8.	2013/2014	947				
9.	2014/2015	901				
10.	2015/2016	1,153				
11.	2016/ 2017	1,543				
12.	2017/2018	1,600				
13.	2018/2019	1,303				
14.	2019/2020	1,236				
	Sub Total	12,823				
15.	2020/2021	1,945				
	TOTAL	14,768				

**Madam Speaker**, through Systematic Land Registration, the National Land Agency is set to deliver 12,000 titles since the four years of its operations and the NLA is targeting producing 8,000 additional titles in 2025/2026. Additionally, we are advancing the transition to Electronic Titling (E-Titling), with vendor selection underway and system implementation expected by 2027/2028, following the necessary legislative amendments to the Registration of Titles Act.

We are now ready to use Systematic Titling to regularise parcels in urban areas starting with a pilot study to inform an expansion of this programme. To support this expansion, we are increasing the number of Commissioned Land Surveyors through an apprenticeship programme at the NLA, with plans to train 33 Student Surveyors and equip them with modern surveying instruments. Additionally, a Geospatial Training Centre, developed in partnership with the Government of Korea, will enhance land survey capabilities using advanced UAV (drone) technology, expediting cadastral mapping and land registration.

### **Registration (Shared Community) Bill**

**Madam Speaker**, a substantial number of communities across Jamaica have shared facilities, which necessitate shared management and expenses. There is an increasing effective demand for these types of developments as Jamaica has steadily moved towards a stable and prosperous economy. Unfortunately, as has been our experience with strata properties, these communities are plagued by numerous challenges that can only be adequately addressed by new legislation. The Government has heeded the numerous cries for help, and Madam Speaker, as promised in my 2024 Budget presentation, the long-awaited Registration (Shared Community) Bill was tabled in the House on March 18, 2025. Commitment made; another commitment kept. This Act, when passed, will provide a clear legal framework to govern all new and existing communities where the proprietors own common real estate or any other facilities and amenities.

**Madam Speaker**, I encourage property owners to review the legislation and to provide any feedback where necessary to ensure it adequately addresses their needs.

### **New Housing Development Areas (Greater Innswood Development Project)**

**Madam Speaker**, beyond the regularisation of existing settlements, we are also building entirely new planned settlements to provide high-quality affordable housing for Jamaicans. The Greater Bernard Lodge Project was the first of this large-scale, master-planned development that represents a new era in sustainable and structured community development in Jamaica. Designed to provide housing, modern amenities, schools, police stations, and commercial spaces, this project is more than just a housing development—it is a holistically planned community that balances residential, commercial, and social infrastructure. By integrating green spaces, essential services, and economic opportunities, Bernard Lodge will offer a high quality of life for its residents while serving as a model for future planned developments across the island. This approach ensures orderly urban expansion, reduces informal settlements, and promotes well-designed, resilient communities, setting the standard for smart growth and sustainable living in Jamaica.

We commenced planning in 2018, with the aim to build 15,000 low- and middle-income housing solutions. To date, 6,000 units have been completed or are under construction with the remainder in varying stages of design, approval or contracting. The designated Town Centre is in the procurement phase, and social services — including a STEAM school, hospital complex, police post, fire station, and transport hub — are set for implementation.

**Madam Speaker**, the next planned development of this kind will be in Innswood. I have given directives to NHT to lead a multi agency team to undertake the master planning for lands at Innswood in addition to lands slated for development along the St. Johns Road corridor. This will include the development of solutions for drainage, traffic management and road improvement, regularisation of informal settlements, and the completion of settlement work for the Naseberry Grove community which was started, but never completed under operation PRIDE. This will create the platform to coordinated and accelerated housing development in the area with the requisite infrastructure and amenities for sustainable communities. Already there is significant Private Sector interest in the area and some have been frustrated by slow and uncertain approval and lack of infrastructure. The Greater Innswood Development Project will solve these issues and and create quality and affordable housing for the people of Jamaica.

### ***New Social Housing Programme***

**Madam Speaker**, owning a home is an important milestone for many Jamaicans. Unfortunately, there are those among us who cannot readily put a roof over their heads due to hardship of no fault of their own. In response, my Administration introduced the New Social Housing Programme to support our most vulnerable. I was quite disappointed that there were elected representatives who would scoff and degrade the programme. The member from South St. Andrew described it as a 'PR exercise'.

**Madam Speaker**, for Ms. Evadne Fearon from North West Manchester, Ms. Nicola Hall from South St. Andrew, and Mr. Jephthah McIntosh from Western Westmoreland (who I understand is present in the gallery) and the almost 1,000 persons impacted by the 280 houses delivered across Jamaica — the New Social Housing Programme was real support that no government has ever given them. The map now being displayed shows the locations of the houses delivered to date.



**Madam Speaker**, my Government will not listen to the noise. **Madam Speaker**, This Government, will continue to deliver for the Jamaican people, especially those who need it the most.

### ***National Housing Trust***

In line with that mission, the National Housing Trust continues to introduce new initiatives aimed at improving access and affordability.

Over the last year, various factors including regulatory approvals and delays in the execution of agreements have impacted scheduled starts. However, twelve (12) projects are now either at the contract stage or have started construction representing, 11,322 housing solutions:

- Mount Nelson, Manchester (1,758) for which I broke ground earlier this month
- Galina, St. Mary (360)
- Dry Valley, Trelawny (1,560)
- Brampton Farms, St. Catherine (2,000)
- Spot Valley, St. James (418)
- Carlsberg, Clarendon, (200)
- Chantilly, Westmoreland (135)
- Friendship Oaks Phase 2, St. Elizabeth (543)
- Longville Park Pen, Clarendon (2,077)
- Barret Hall, St. James (1,565)
- Rozelle, St. Thomas (660), and
- Non-Such, St. Mary (46)

Planning and design are also underway for schemes consisting of 10,598 solutions, including 5,000 solutions in Longville IV, Clarendon.

**Madam Speaker**, the NHT will commence construction of more than 19,575 solutions across all parishes over the next two years and continues to acquire lands for new developments.

### ***Advances to Developers under the Developers Programme and the Guaranteed Purchase Programme***

**Madam Speaker**, one of the challenges that developers face is that advances provided by the NHT are insufficient to cover the large initial capital outlays required as infrastructure can account for 20-25% of the overall project cost. Therefore, NHT is revising its financing framework to enhance flexibility in the release of payment advances.

In addition to the current mobilisation advance of up to 5%, the NHT will provide an additional 20% for the Developers Programme and 15% for the Guaranteed Purchase Programme to reimburse developers at the different stages of the project as key infrastructure milestones are achieved.

### ***Small Development Partnership Programme***

Additionally, **Madam Speaker**, in order to address the difficulty of identifying and accessing large tracts of land for housing in some areas (especially urban and semi-urban), the NHT will seek to partner with owners of small parcels of land under the Small Development Partnership Programme. This initiative will see the NHT providing project funding, and the technical/construction expertise while the land owner will offer their property as their equity for the development. The proposed properties must be zoned for residential purposes and have access to the requisite support infrastructure (potable water, electricity, sewerage). This is targeted at houses for the low-income and affordable segment of the housing market, therefore the selling price of the units must be under the price point set by the NHT.

### **Updates on NHT Initiatives**

**Madam Speaker**, in my last Budget presentation, I highlighted various NHT initiatives geared towards improving affordability, access, sustainability and equity. Today, I will update on a few of those and highlight upcoming initiatives.

#### ***Police Station Rehabilitation***

**Madam Speaker**, the NHT continues to play a significant role in providing enhanced facilities for our law enforcement officers by targeting the rehabilitation of 12 Police Stations within a 10km radius of NHT Schemes. In February we would have seen the opening of the \$175-million Lacovia Police Station in St. Elizabeth and just last week the opening of the \$200-million Frome Police Station in Westmoreland.

#### ***Scholarships***

**Madam Speaker**, last year the NHT introduced a new scholarship programme to support tertiary students pursuing careers in construction-related fields, providing a maximum of \$1 million tuition per annum per student for ten (10) students. I will be meeting with the recipients next month to offer my own congratulations.

#### ***Smart Energy Grant for Public Sector Pensioners***

In July 2024, the NHT introduced the Smart Energy Grant for Public Sector Pensioners earning less than \$30,000.99 per week, awarding up to \$1.5 million for the installation of solar panels and other alternative energy systems. Each round of the programme targeted 10 pensioners per parish with beneficiaries selected at random after satisfying the established criteria. To date, 280 beneficiaries have been selected, and 87 disbursements have been made.

**For the upcoming financial year, the Smart Energy Grant will be expanded to include Private Sector pensioners.**

### ***Deposit Requirements***

Currently, the NHT provides 100% mortgage financing to mortgagors for its Scheme solutions. For housing units and house lots purchased by NHT contributors on the open market, the NHT provides a maximum of 95% financing, requiring prospective mortgagors to finance the deposit of 5%. The inability to find the deposit for property figures prominently among the impediments to home ownership. Therefore, **commencing July 1, 2025, for contributors who earn less than \$30,000 weekly, the deposit requirement on open market loans will be reduced to 2%, if the housing solution being acquired is priced at or below \$14 million.**

### ***Service Charges***

Starting July 1, 2025, the service charge will be reduced as follows:

- **For prospective mortgagors who earn \$30,000 or less each week, their service charge will reduce from 2% of the loan amount to zero,**
- **For prospective mortgagors earning between \$30,000 and \$42,000 per week, their service charge will be reduced from 5% of the loan amount to 2%.**

For prospective mortgagors earning \$42,001 per week and above, their service charge will remain at 5%.

### ***Expanding the scope of the Home Grant***

**Madam Speaker**, currently, a minimum wage earner who has contributed to the NHT for at least seven (7) years may access a Home Grant of up to \$3.5 million. We are modifying the eligibility requirements in order to make the grant available to more contributors. The maximum qualifying income for Home Grants will now be \$30,000 per week.

The NHT is mindful that house construction can be challenging particularly in light of the rising costs of labour and materials. Consequently, a number of contributors have been unable to complete their housing units or bring it to a habitable stage — resulting in some instances, in contributors having to balance limited resources between rent and servicing their construction loans.

In instances where a current or retired contributor earning \$30,000 per week or less, accessed a Build-on-Own-Land or Construction Loan benefit to construct a housing unit comprising 2 bedrooms or less, for which that unit has remained incomplete for 2 years or more, due to the unavailability of funds, the NHT will:

Firstly, offer the mortgagor an additional loan of up to the difference between the balance of the borrower's current loan and a limit of \$11M, subject to affordability.

Secondly, where this additional fund is not able to bring the unit to a habitable stage, or, in the case of pensioners, there is insufficient income to support a loan arrangement, the NHT may provide a Home Grant of up to \$3.5M to assist in bringing the unit to completion.

### ***Targeted Institutional Loan Programme***

**Madam Speaker**, a number of contributors who work in the public health system face challenges in finding suitable housing especially when they are not from a nearby community or where they have transferred from another health facility.

**The NHT will expand its Institutional Loan Programme and pursue partnerships with hospitals through the Ministry of Health and Wellness and the Regional Health Authorities to provide housing for employees in the public health system.** Where possible, these housing units will be constructed on the hospital compound. The NHT has begun preliminary discussions with the University Hospital of the West Indies, and one rural hospital under this programme.

Additionally, we continue to explore options for tourism, security and education sectors.

### ***Smart Energy Loans***

The NHT's Smart Energy Loan has been welcomed by NHT contributors with 327 loans already disbursed. I am pleased to announce that, **effective July 1, 2025, the Smart Energy Loan amount will be increased from the current \$1.5 million to \$2.5 million.** To improve accessibility of the loan for lower income contributors, the **applicable interest rate will now be 0 - 5% in line with income bands rather than a fixed 5%.**

### ***Contribution Refunds to Private Sector Mortgages***

**Madam Speaker**, currently, all contributors who do not have a mortgage processed directly at the NHT, are eligible for a cash refund of their contributions as they fall due. Public Sector Workers are however able to access cash refunds even while servicing a mortgage. This option is currently not available to private sector mortgages.

**Effective July 1, 2025, private sector mortgages will have the option for either a cash refund or the application of their refund amounts to their existing mortgage obligations,** provided that the loan is free of arrears. Madam Speaker, this will be assessed on a year-by-year basis based on NHT's cash flow position.

### ***Home Improvement Loan***

Effective July 1, 2025, the NHT will **reduce the waiting time to access this facility from 10 to 7 years.** The loan limit for this benefit will be **increased to \$5 million up from \$3.5 million.**

### **Loan Limit**

**Madam Speaker**, the NHT increased the loan limit in 2019, and again in 2023. I am pleased to announce a further increase effective July 1, 2025.

The individual loan limit will be increased from \$7.5 million to \$9 million. For two co-applicants, the combined maximum loan limit will be increased from \$15 million to \$17 million. And for three co-applicants, it will increase from \$21 million to \$23 million.

**Madam Speaker**, if an individual mortgagor is purchasing a unit priced at \$14 million or less, the NHT will lend that individual up to \$12 million, subject to affordability.

Also, for construction of houses by individual contributors, the individual construction loan limit will be increased to \$11 million. For two co-applicants, it will be \$17 million and for three applicants, \$23 million.

### **50th Anniversary**

**Madam Speaker**, in the 2025/26 fiscal year, the National Housing Trust (NHT) will celebrate 50 years of service to the people of Jamaica. Recognising the profound impact of Emancipation Park and Harmony Park in providing a space for recreation, wellness, and community engagement, the **NHT will commemorate this milestone by developing a new park in Mandeville (Centre of the Island)**. In addition, for this special year, the Trust will also award **50 scholarships instead of the usual 10 under its scholarship programme**.

### **Factories Corporation of Jamaica**

**Madam Speaker**, the Factories Corporation of Jamaica (FCJ) continues to drive major projects that enhance productive capacity and economic growth across the country.

The Factories Corporation of Jamaica is playing a critical role in modernising town centres across the island. The Morant Bay Urban Centre faced scepticism from some, but look at it now – it is nearing completion and is set to open in mid-May. Demand has far exceeded expectations, with space requests surpassing availability by 50%. To accommodate small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the FCJ has acquired 10 additional acres adjacent to the Urban Centre to develop a 200,000 sq. ft. Micro Business Park, providing dedicated spaces for small and micro businesses. Additionally, two six-storey buildings are being designed to house the National Insurance Fund and a medical services block.

Building on the success of Morant Bay, Boundbrook (Portland) is out of the planning phase and will commence construction in the coming Fiscal Year 2025/2026. Plans are being advanced for Negril, Naggo Head, Old Harbour, and Lucea. These projects will bring modern infrastructure, commercial opportunities, and essential services to communities across Jamaica. The intention is to modernise all our townships and urban commercial nodes. They are all overcrowded, inconvenient and unappealing aesthetically. First we will decongest the towns by developing bypasses, this will also open up new lands,

which we will then commission a master development plan and pursue public-private partnerships to execute the development. We will also partner with property owners and business operators in the old town to develop the town and upgrade existing infrastructure.

**Madam Speaker**, the Garmex Freezone Redevelopment is making significant progress. Phase 1, comprising 126,000 sq. ft., was completed in the first quarter of the last financial year and is now fully occupied. Phase 2, at approximately 115,000 sq.ft., is currently in the design and development phase, while Phase 3 will see the development of 5.7 acres of vacant land. Once completed, Garmex will house over one million square feet of industrial and commercial space, making it one of the largest industrial complexes in the Caribbean.

These projects mark a transformative era for Jamaica's urban and industrial landscape, ensuring sustainable growth, economic expansion, and improved quality of life for citizens.

### **Urban Development Corporation**

**Madam Speaker**, the Portmore Resilience Park, now 50% complete, is set to open this summer. Designed with climate resilience in mind, it will incorporate solar energy, water conservation, and recycling, setting a new standard for environmentally responsible urban spaces. Additionally, next month, we will break ground on the RainTree Commercial Complex, a 69-lot commercial and light industrial subdivision in Caymanas, St. Catherine. This development is part of a larger 4,000-unit residential and mixed-use transformation planned for the Caymanas area, with agreements being advanced in partnership with the private sector. In another significant move toward urban renewal, we are expanding the Kingston Harbour Walk with support from the Caribbean Development Bank and World Bank, ushering in a new era of sustainable development in Downtown Kingston and Port Royal. In collaboration with the NWA, NEPA, the roadway from the NMIA roundabout into Port Royal will be improved and expanded to include a dedicated cycling lane and Jogging Trail. This will be done respectful of the environment and history of the area. **Madam Speaker**, Kingston, and in Jamaica needs more dedicated, purpose built, recreational infrastructure.

### **New Urban Renewal Incentive Legislation**

**Madam Speaker**, to drive urban renewal, we must modernise the Urban Renewal (Tax Relief) Act, which since 1995 has incentivised investment in regenerating blighted areas. While it has supported 56 projects, mostly in Downtown Kingston, with a handful in Spanish Town and Montego Bay, its impact has been limited. Of the \$25.8 billion in approved incentives, only \$8.5 billion has been utilised.

The programme is set to expire in June 2026, presenting an opportunity for a more comprehensive framework to be developed. By December 2025, we will introduce new legislation to expand redevelopment zones, streamline approvals, and enhance incentives.

## NEW URBAN RENEWAL INCENTIVE LEGISLATION



Additional geographical areas to be designated (Phase 1 - sections of Downtown Kingston, Central Kingston, Vineyard Town, Swallowfield, Spanish Town, Caymanas, Montego Bay, Morant Bay, Port Antonio)



Single approval window for faster approvals



Tax benefits transferable from developers to buyers

**Madam Speaker**, we will adopt a phased approach, with certain areas being designated initially and, as those are developed, additional areas will be designated. In the first phase, designated areas will include Downtown Kingston, Central Kingston, Vineyard Town, Swallowfield, Olympic Gardens, Spanish Town, Caymanas, Montego Bay, Port Antonio, Lucea, Negril, and Morant Bay. These will be formally reclassified as Urban Development Corporation (UDC) Designated Areas, allowing the UDC to spearhead development, as it successfully did in Negril and Ocho Rios.

Additionally, the cumbersome approval process, which currently takes up to three years, will be replaced by a single approval portal under the UDC, drastically reducing delays and making investment more attractive.

To further incentivise development, tax credits will become transferable. This means that unused tax credits associated with a particular property can be transferred upon sale to a new owner, enabling greater flexibility in structuring transactions so that incentives can be fully utilised. With these reforms, this Government is laying the foundation for a new era of urban transformation.

### Energy

**Madam Speaker**, this Government remains resolute in its commitment to a strategic and sustainable energy transition that balances affordability, reliability, and environmental responsibility.

### Renewable Energy

**Madam Speaker**, Jamaica's commitment to renewable energy development has earned global recognition. In the 2024 Climatescope report by BloombergNEF, Jamaica climbed eight places to rank

39th worldwide and 10th in Latin America and the Caribbean. This improvement is a testament to our robust energy policies, strategic incentives, and our unwavering commitment to achieving 50% renewable energy by 2030.

To further accelerate this transition, the Government has recently awarded 100 MW of new renewable generation capacity which is expected to come on stream by 2027. An additional 220 MW of renewables with storage are scheduled to be procured in 2025 alongside JPS' replacement of 171.5 MW of retiring fossil fuel units using only renewables. This will bring renewable electricity generation to approximately 48% when the projects are connected to the grid. Madam Speaker, this is a measured and structured approach that prioritises grid stability, cost-effectiveness, and the long-term sustainability of our electricity sector.

The Government acknowledges recent discussions in the media regarding the pace of our renewable energy transition. While some argue for a more rapid shift, this Government remains committed to a structured and responsible approach that secures lower prices while ensuring grid reliability. This is why we are steadfast in our adherence to the Integrated Resource Plan (IRP), which serves as our blueprint for sustainable and cost-effective energy development.

### **Reducing Electricity Costs**

**Madam Speaker**, the cost of energy is a key component of the cost of living and this Government has introduced significant changes to cushion the impact of high energy costs.



**RESIDENTIAL ELECTRICITY PRICE REDUCTIONS**  
**Effective May 1, 2025**

- **GCT down from 15% to 7%**
- 150KWH per month GCT-free threshold for postpaid replaced by **10% rebate for consumption up to 250HWH per month.**

A customer who consumes 240KWH per month will see a reduction of approximately 8.5% in their monthly bill.

As I had announced in November 2024, and the Minister of Finance and the Public Service stated last week, the GCT on residential electricity will be reduced from 15% to 7%, effective May 1, 2025.

Also, the 150KWH per month GCT-free threshold will be removed and replaced with an incentive-based rebate of 10% for customers consuming up to 250KWH per month. Madam Speaker, the rebate has been designed to incentivise energy conservation as only households consuming up to 250KWH are entitled to the rebate.

### ***Expanding Access and Addressing Energy Poverty***

**Madam Speaker**, the Government is also determined to address the issue of energy poverty in the country. We are allocating \$1 billion to cover wiring and inspection costs for the first 20,000 first-time JPS customers under this programme to get regularised and on the grid.



### **ADDRESSING ENERGY POVERTY**

- **\$1 Billion** allocated to support regularization for first **20,000 first time prepaid meter installations** to cover wiring and inspection costs.
- **Innovative technical solutions** such as ready boards complete with circuit breakers, socket outlets and a light
- **\$4,000 per month free top-up for six months** for first 20,000 first time prepaid meter installations under the Programme. Cost shared 50/50 between JPSCo and the Government.

We are also exploring ways to reduce the cost of formalisation including innovative technical solutions such as ready boards complete with circuit breakers, socket outlets and a light that could effectively form a low-cost starter pack for household wiring systems.

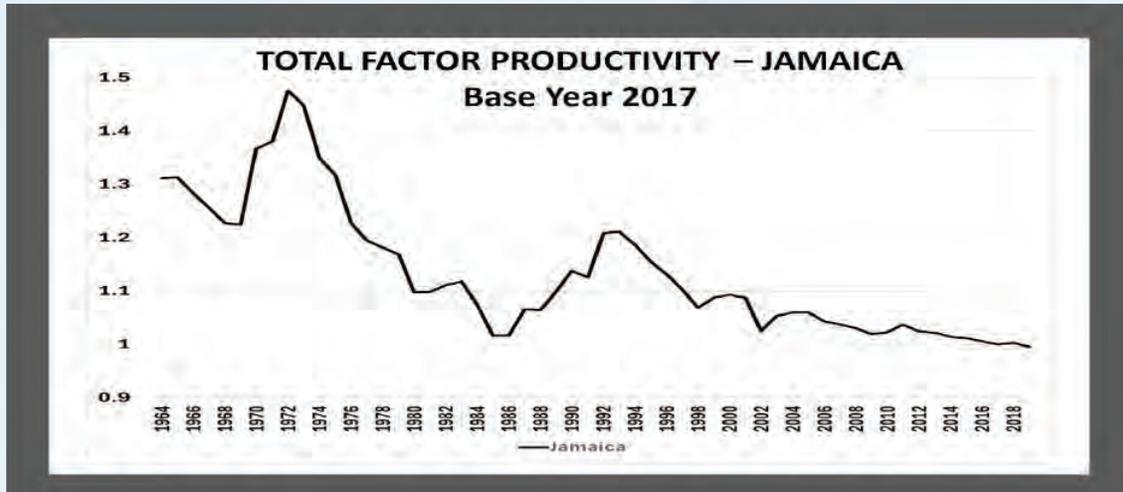
**Madam Speaker**, for the first 20,000 new prepaid meter installations under the programme, there will be a free monthly top up of \$4,000 per month for six months, the cost of which will be shared 50/50 between JPSCo and the Government.

### ***Renegotiation of the JPSCo. Licence***

**Madam Speaker**, as Minister Vaz has already announced, the Government has signalled its intention to renegotiate the licence with JPS, which expires in July 2027 and is in the process of engaging international experts to support it.

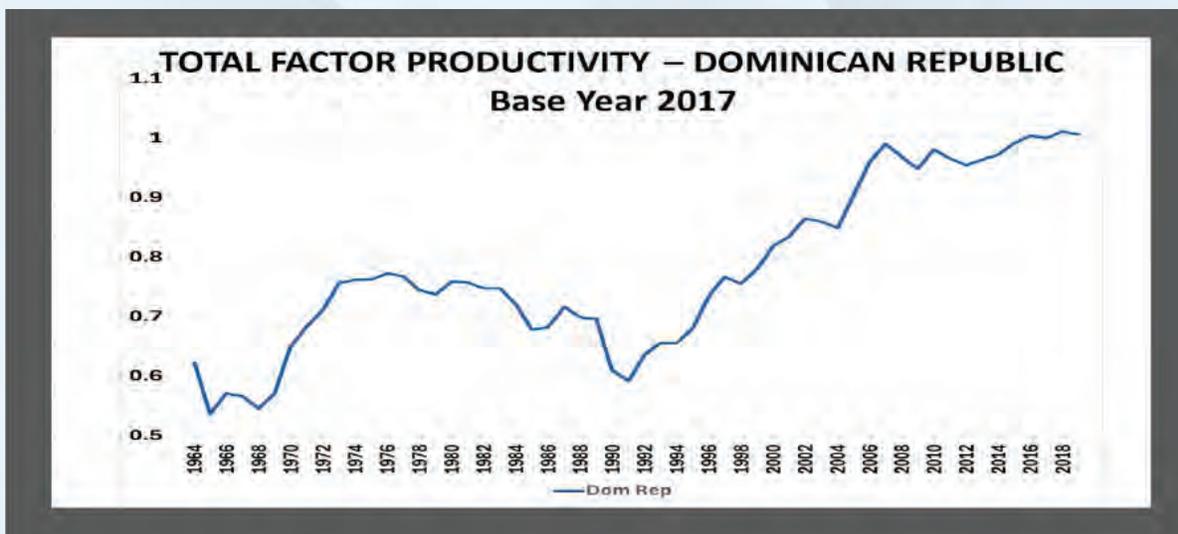
## The “R” in ASPIRE - Reform of the Bureaucracy to Improve Ease, Speed and Cost of Doing Business

### Productivity



**Madam Speaker**, the graph now being displayed shows the total factor productivity trend for Jamaica from 1964 to 2019. Note that our period of highest productivity was in the decade following independence and peaked in 1972. That was also our period of highest growth – averaging 6% per annum. Since then we have been declining apart from a brief period of growth in the 1980s and early 1990s. **Madam Speaker**, note the precipitous fall in the 1970s from 1973 onwards and again in the mid-1990s. These were the periods that coincided with the exodus of skilled labour as well as capital flight.

**Madam Speaker**, we also have the apparent paradox of lower unemployment post 2016 associated with flat or marginally declining productivity. This is because the additional labour being absorbed into the workforce has been lower skilled. The result is an expansion of employment but a dilution of average productivity.



Now let's look at the Dominican Republic, one of the fastest growing economies in Latin America and the Caribbean. The trend is the opposite of Jamaica.

**Madam Speaker**, the single most important factor constraining our economic growth today is our level of productivity. Every Jamaican must understand that there is no growth without productivity. For our economy to expand and thrive, we need to achieve higher output per worker, higher output per hour.

Productivity is not just a matter of how hard people work; it is a function of factors such as the level of investment in physical and human capital, which allows workers to work smarter and get more done with the same or even less effort. Imagine if you were ploughing a field and, instead of using just a fork, you used a tractor. You would still work, but you would accomplish much more in the same amount of time. That is what productivity is: finding better tools, skills, or methods to produce more value.

Productivity is also a function of the quality of the nation's infrastructure. Efficient roads and ports reduce travel times and logistical costs for workers and businesses. This allows firms to produce and deliver goods faster, enabling workers to focus on higher-value tasks.

The prevalence of violence and crime in the country also influences productivity and growth by hindering investment.

Improving all these factors will be necessary to get Jamaica out of this trap of low growth and move towards prosperity.

## **Bureaucracy**

**Madam Speaker**, to boost productivity, we must urgently reform Jamaica's public bureaucracy. While our stringent fiscal policies have successfully reduced debt and restored stability, the same controls that curbed wasteful spending now delay approvals, stall infrastructure projects, and hinder growth. These systems must be redesigned to meet today's development needs.

A clear example is the Troy Bridge in Trelawny Southern, which collapsed in August 2021. Despite bipartisan support, it took nearly three years to clear bureaucratic hurdles before construction finally began in July 2024. The delay was not due to funding or technical constraints but the inefficiency of our public investment and procurement processes.

Jamaica must now shift from merely controlling spending to enabling strategic growth. This does not mean abandoning accountability but finding a balanced approach that safeguards public funds while allowing decisive action. The amendments to the Procurement Act are a step forward, but much more is needed. Just as we dominate track and field with our speed, we must make efficiency and ease of doing business our competitive edge. By cutting red tape and leveraging technology, we will transform Jamaica into the region's most business-friendly destination.

To drive this transformation, I have appointed Minister Marks to lead the Streamlining Processes for Efficiency and Economic Development (SPEED) initiative. Minister Marks will oversee a comprehensive review of governance systems to eliminate inefficiencies, reduce delays, and enhance business operations.

Minister Marks' SPEED mandate is to undertake a comprehensive review of Jamaica's governance arrangements, systems, and processes and to implement targeted reforms across the whole of government that will eliminate inefficiencies, reduce bureaucratic delays, and enhance the ease and speed of doing business.

Today, I am making the first announcement under SPEED. I have directed Minister Vaz to implement the following changes:

1. The first Certificate of Fitness for new motor vehicles will be issued for 5 years. For used vehicles, 10 years old or less, the validity period for Certificates of Fitness will be 3 years. For vehicles older than 10 years, the current yearly renewal will remain.
2. Motor vehicle registration - Motorists currently have an option to renew motor vehicle registration for six months or for one year. We will be introducing a two-year renewal option.

**Madam Speaker**, this is just the beginning. We will be reviewing systems and processes across all sectors to identify ways to make life simpler, more convenient, and more affordable for citizens. Whether it is reducing wait times, improving service delivery, or streamlining regulatory and approval processes, we are taking a comprehensive approach to ensure that the everyday experience of our citizens is one of efficiency, fairness, and ease.

## **Digital Transformation**

**Madam Speaker**, digital transformation is central to improving productivity and the ease of doing business. The provision of digital services is also the fastest growing industry globally and therefore a key part of our growth agenda. Our vision is clear: to make Jamaica a Digital Society, where businesses thrive in a tech-driven economy, and where government services are seamless, efficient, and accessible to all.

### ***The New ICT Authority***

**Madam Speaker**, to drive this national transformation, the new Information Communications and Technology Authority will come into being at the commencement of the new fiscal year. eGov Jamaica Limited will be transitioned to this new ICT Authority which will provide the unified framework to expand the range of ICT services required across the Government and consolidate the digital needs of Government and citizens alike.

## **Connectivity and Access**

**Madam Speaker**, just like roads and highways enable the movement of goods and people in the physical economy, we need information superhighways to transmit data in the digital economy. We have made significant progress in enhancing connectivity and collaboration between government entities and citizens through strategic investments in our National Broadband Network and in the Government Network (GovNet). Together, these projects will ensure that every corner of Jamaica is connected and no one is left without access to the Digital Society.

To date, 702 schools, 145 Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs), and 43 other government offices have been connected. And, in the coming year, we will extend services to an additional 224 entities, including educational institutions and courthouses.

## **National Identification**

**Madam Speaker**, there can be no Digital Society without a proper system of identification and authentication.

A national identification system has been talked about for over 50 years. This Government has finally got it done. We commenced issuing Jamaica's first electronic identification cards on November 15, 2024.

**Madam Speaker**, the next step is to develop and expand digital services that leverage this secure and reliable form of identification. With the new electronic National Identification Card, citizens will soon be able to verify their identity securely online, eliminating the need for cumbersome paperwork and in-person visits. This will pave the way for e-government services, digital payments, and a more efficient, transparent, and inclusive public sector. **Madam Speaker**, we are not only making life easier for our people but also unlocking new opportunities for innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic growth.

**Madam Speaker**, pensioners currently have to complete a Proof of Life Form every three months and get it signed by a JP. We will soon be introducing the AmAlive App that will enable you to use your new national ID to complete the proof of life from the comfort of your home in no more than two (2) minutes. We have a video to give a preview of how this will work.

**Madam Speaker**, I want to emphasise that the AmAlive App is just an option we are providing to make it easier. We are in no way compelling persons to use it. If for whatever reason, persons are not comfortable, the paper option will remain available.



### ***Post Offices to become Digital Service Centres***

**Madam Speaker**, we are currently renovating and upgrading the Post Offices into modern Post Offices and NIRA Service Centres – in Mandeville, Black River, May Pen, Santa Cruz, Ocho Rios, Montego Bay, Falmouth, St Ann's Bay, Brown's Town and Spaulding. Construction is scheduled to be completed in the first quarter of 2025/2026. Additional locations slated for renovation are in the procurement process - Mona, Constant Spring, Half Way Tree, Lucea, Savanna-La-Mar, the RGD Spanish Town, Linstead, Old Harbour, Yallahs, Morant Bay, Port Antonio, Port Maria, and Greater Portmore.

**Madam Speaker**, when the upgrades are complete, these service centres will enable Jamaica Post to rapidly expand its premium services and provide modern spaces for NIRA to expand access to civil registration and national identification services. They will also serve as centres to assist persons who may need help with the use of digital platforms to access government services.

### **The “E” in ASPIRE – Economic Diversification**

**Madam Speaker**, if we are to secure Jamaica's long-term economic prosperity, we must broaden our economic base and create new engines of growth. This means catalysing the development of new industries — ones where Jamaica possesses unique comparative and competitive advantages, and where we can carve out a niche in the global marketplace.

For decades, we have spoken about untapped opportunities in emerging industries. We have recognised Jamaica's potential in areas such as shipping and logistics, digital services, agribusiness, medical tourism, creative industries, and renewable energy. However, despite the discussions, these industries have not yet scaled up in a transformative way. We are determined to take decisive action to ensure that these opportunities materialise into sustainable, high-value industries that generate jobs, increase exports, and drive inclusive economic growth.

Economic diversification is an imperative. If we are to reduce our vulnerability to external shocks, create a more dynamic and competitive economy, and provide greater opportunities for Jamaicans across all sectors of society, we must invest in the industries of tomorrow, while strengthening the foundations of today.

### **Shipping and Logistics**

**Madam Speaker**, for decades, we have spoken of the vision to make Jamaica the premier logistics hub of the Americas. We are making steady progress towards realising that vision.

#### ***Kingston Container Terminal***

**Madam Speaker**, the Port of Kingston is a critical element of Jamaica's vision to become a global logistics hub, leveraging our strategic location at the intersection of north-south and east-west shipping lanes. Since July 2016, when we entered into a 30-year Concession Agreement for the expansion and

modernisation of the Kingston Container Terminal, over US\$400 million has been invested in capital improvements, equipment and advanced geo-positioning technology to bring the terminal to world class levels. An additional US\$50 million will be invested in 2025 on two more cranes and other equipment.

**Madam Speaker**, cargo volumes at the Terminal have surged by over 50% since 2017. Employment at the terminal has also risen by 53%. Today, Kingston proudly ranks among the top 100 ports globally — a testament to the strategic advancements we have made.

This rapid volume growth means we are running out of space to store containers. It is a good problem to have. To maintain our efficiency and competitiveness, we are taking decisive action. The Port Authority of Jamaica (PAJ) is working with Kingston Freeport Terminal Ltd. (KFTL) to expand cargo storage and construct an additional 15 hectares of space on the “Westlands” at a cost of US\$80 million, with potential for further expansion.



On the map now being displayed, the area shaded in red shows the existing area of Kingston Freeport Terminal Limited. The area in green is Kingston Wharves Limited. This area shown in yellow on the map is the Westlands where the US\$80 million expansion will take place.

In addition, **Madam Speaker**, as I had announced in my Budget presentation last year, plans are in motion to relocate domestic aviation operations from Tinson Pen to Norman Manley International Airport and reroute Marcus Garvey Drive. This will free up significant additional lands needed for further port expansion. This is shown in blue in the map now being displayed.

### **Newport West Roads PPP**

**Madam Speaker**, the Government recognises that many roads, including privately owned or orphan roads, have fallen into disrepair over the years due to lack of clear ownership, limited public funding, and

the absence of a structured maintenance plan. However, rather than allowing these roads to continue deteriorating, this Government is taking a proactive approach by engaging private stakeholders who are willing to invest in the rehabilitation of the roads they use daily.

**Madam Speaker**, I am pleased to report that we will be entering into a Public-Private Partnership arrangement involving The Port Authority, The Jamaica Customs Agency, the National Works Agency, the Shipping Association of Jamaica and Kingston Wharves Limited for repairs to the road infrastructure in Newport West at a cost of over J\$80 million.

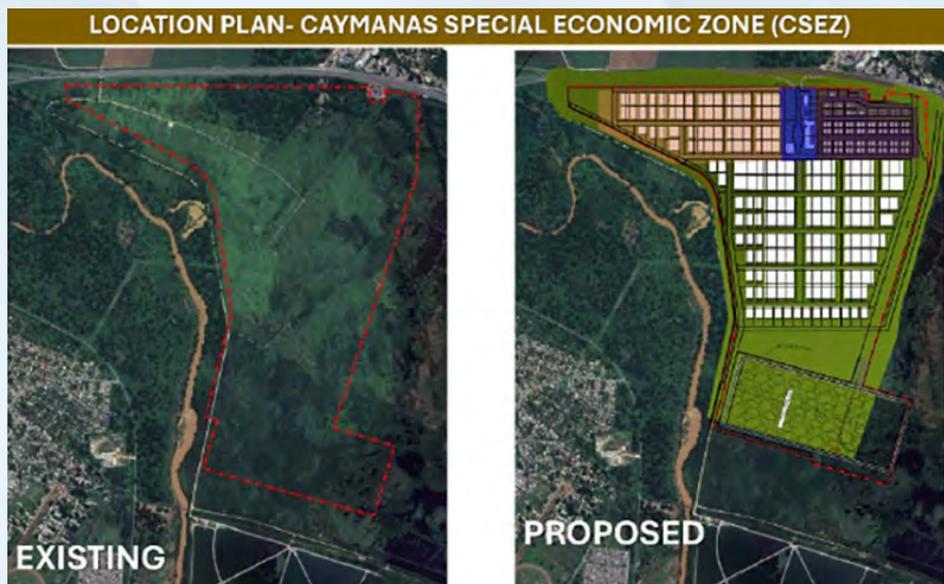
We are actively exploring similar PPP arrangements for other priority areas where private sector collaboration can help fast-track road improvements. This Government is thinking differently, acting decisively, to find solutions to longstanding challenges.

### ***Caymanas Special Economic Zone***

Beyond the port and the lands in the immediate vicinity of the port, another key pillar of our logistics vision is the 700-acre Caymanas Special Economic Zone (CSEZ) Project.

**Madam Speaker**, this project has been talked about for decades. This Government is finally making it a reality. With a strategic location near the Port of Kingston and major highways, the CSEZ is set to transform Jamaica's logistics and manufacturing sectors, attracting global investments and creating thousands of jobs.

**Madam Speaker**, to catalyse the project, the Port Authority has been tasked with land preparation to address climate change risks including flooding, bringing basic infrastructure and utilities to the site, creating direct transportation linkages to the Container Terminal, as well as constructing prebuilt space for investors who would wish to come to Jamaica but would rather lease facilities.



To date the detailed engineering designs have been completed, the tendering process for the first phase of land preparation and infrastructure works is completed, and all the necessary approvals are in place. **Madam Speaker**, I am pleased to report that groundbreaking is scheduled for the first quarter of the upcoming fiscal year.

**Madam Speaker**, for decades, we have talked about making Jamaica the logistics hub of the Americas. For too long, this vision remained just that — a vision. But under this Government, we are turning words into action, plans into progress, and ambition into achievement. We are not just talking about Jamaica's potential; we are unlocking it. We are building the logistics hub, creating jobs, driving investment, and securing our place in global trade.

## **Tourism and Linkages**

**Madam Speaker**, Jamaica's tourism story of 2024 is one of remarkable resilience and growth. We welcomed 4.1 million visitors, generating approximately US\$4.3 billion in revenue. This marks real progress towards our '5x5x5' target of 5 million visitors and US\$5 billion in earnings by 2025. Despite challenges like the pandemic, travel advisories, severe weather, and airlift restrictions, the sector has thrived through strategic planning.

Over 2,000 new hotel rooms were completed in 2024, advancing our goal of 20,000 rooms in the next 10 to 15 years. Notable developments include the 753-room Riu Palace Aquarelle in Trelawny and the opening of 1,000 rooms at the 2,000-room Princess Grand Jamaica and Princess Senses, The Mangrove in Hanover. The 530-room Unico Hotel in Montego Bay is set to open in early 2026, with more resorts planned islandwide.

**Madam Speaker**, at first glance, including **tourism** in Jamaica's economic **diversification** strategy may seem paradoxical, given the sector's long-standing dominance. However, the key lies in **leveraging the tremendous success of tourism to deepen linkages** with other industries—such as agriculture, manufacturing, and entertainment—to ensure more of the tourism dollar stays in the local economy. This approach transforms tourism from a traditional economic pillar into a **catalyst for diversification**, reducing leakages and maximising national benefits. To further intensify these efforts, I have appointed Minister Delano Seiveright as State Minister with a specific mandate to deepen the linkages among tourism and key sectors of the economy.

**Madam Speaker**, we have made progress in deepening the connections between tourism and the rest of the economy, increasing procurement from domestic suppliers through the Agri Linkages Exchange (ALEX) platform. We opened the Artisan Village in April 2024, to showcase Jamaican creativity with augmented and virtual reality enhancing cultural experiences.

However, there is still much more to be done. To unlock these opportunities, we will strengthen partnerships between the Government, private sector, and tourism stakeholders, fostering greater investment in agriculture, agro-processing, and light manufacturing. We will also explore incentives that complement the recently announced accelerated capital allowances, stimulating investment in these critical linkages.

Tourism represents a captive market with high demand for consistent and quality local supplies. To maximise these opportunities, we will encourage hotels and restaurants to directly engage small businesses, source locally, and expand employment and training programmes for Jamaicans, particularly in tourist areas.

Furthermore, we will work to improve market mechanisms for local farmers and manufacturers, including cold storage, transportation, and risk-sharing arrangements. By bringing hotels, distributors, and small businesses together, we can increase economies of scale, strengthen value-added agricultural products, and ensure local producers can meet the demands of the tourism industry.

**Madam Speaker**, advancing tourism linkages will be a national priority—ensuring that the success of tourism translates into prosperity for all Jamaicans. Of course, my Minister of Tourism will give his usual dynamic update on the industry during his sectoral presentation.

## **Agriculture**

**Madam Speaker**, I now turn towards a sector that is fundamental to our survival and prosperity – agriculture, the lifeblood of our nation. Agriculture is not just about tradition; it is about our future. A nation that cannot feed itself cannot be truly independent.

Our policy is built on three pillars. First, **reducing the cost of food for all Jamaicans. Second, maximising the productivity and potential of our farmers. And third, improving agricultural sustainability.**

### **Priority Number 1: Reduce Food Prices**

**Madam Speaker**, there is no denying it, food is expensive. I know how difficult it is and I am aware of the impact this is having on many families.

**Madam Speaker**, this government will not increase the cost of food with more taxes. Instead, we have started a strategic review of tariffs for food that we do not produce at competitive prices locally. A significant portion of every dollar spent on imported food is taxes. There are import duties, stamp duties and General Consumption Tax (GCT). Not to mention, compliance fees and an environmental levy.

A few months ago, the Opposition Spokesperson on Agriculture, said that he would ‘put a little thing’ on food. Madam Speaker, I believe him. They did it not once but twice. In 2007, their government introduced the environmental levy and then in 2015 they increased it. They heaped these taxes on the backs of the Jamaican people, further increasing the cost of food. We will not go back to those days.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Mining, along with the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Industry, Investment and Commerce established a working group to conduct a strategic review of all our food imports to determine which duties to reduce. Recommendations from this group are now being reviewed by the Ministry of Finance for implementation.

**Madam Speaker,** I want to emphasise that these measures will not hurt our farmers. In fact, we will be increasing the Ministry of Agriculture's J\$1.2 billion Production and Productivity Programme, to help our farmers navigate any uncertainty.

**Madam Speaker,** in 2016 when we received a mandate from the Jamaican people, the level of direct support to farmers was around J\$200 million. In our 2020 Manifesto we indicated that we would move that figure to at least \$1 billion through our Agri Care initiative. We have held true to that commitment, and since then have provided over J\$4 billion in direct support to our farmers!

**Madam Speaker,** the Government will also ensure, through the Consumer Affairs Commission and the Ministry of Agriculture, that distributors, wholesalers, and supermarkets do not exploit consumers by inflating prices. Commodity price reports will be published bi-weekly through traditional and social media to keep the public informed and protect consumers from unfair practices.

### ***Priority Number 2: Maximising the Productivity and Potential of our Farmers***

**Madam Speaker,** as we are all aware, last year was one of the most challenging years for agriculture. We saw our new climate realities on full display as we went from drought to a Category 5 hurricane to non-stop rains.

The recovery of our agriculture sector must be quick and robust. While a number of inputs critical to agricultural production are zero-rated, the Ministry of Agriculture has highlighted that seeds are not and as such are adding costs to local production. I have therefore directed the Minister of Finance and the Public Service to do the necessary amendment to the GCT Act to make seeds zero-rated.

We care for our farmers! We promote food security and now, we have to increase our international competitiveness and productivity.

We will also revise the GCT Act to redefine eligible vehicles to include versatile options like panel vans and small trucks. These vehicles will now benefit from the existing 20% duty concession that currently only applies to pickup trucks. In other words, we are removing barriers that limit our farmers' ability to transport perishable goods, equipment and livestock feed efficiently. This Government will further move to amend the age to permit the importation of light commercial vehicles from 10 to 15 years to reduce the financial burden on our farmers.

While our fish farmers have always benefitted from these duty concessions, our marine fishers have not. This unfortunate anomaly will now be addressed. Steps will be taken for our registered fishers to be included in the 20% motor vehicle duty concession regime.

### ***Priority Number 3: Building Resilience and Sustainability***

**Madam Speaker,** our farmers have faced repeated devastation from droughts and storms. After such disasters there are severe shortages and prices skyrocket. To compensate, farmers replant at the same time resulting in an oversupply and in turn prices collapse. We are seeing this with tomatoes, for example.

To address this, the Government is expanding our cold storage capacity. Last month we broke ground for a **J\$124 million state-of-the-art facility in Kirkvine, Manchester**. We have also started the procurement process to commence the **refurbishment of the Coleyville cold storage facility**.

**Madam Speaker**, access to water has been a perennial challenge for decades. But this administration has presided over **the most significant expansion of irrigation access in the history of Jamaica**.

I am pleased to announce that the **Parnassus Agro Park, which would have benefitted from the Southern Plains Agricultural Development (SPAD) Project, has now been completed**. Over 60 farmers have been approved, and this new agro park will commence operations next month. The SPAD Project as a whole has benefited over 800 farms in total.

**Essex Valley, which would benefit over 1000 farmers, is almost complete**. The contract has been signed for the final element of that project – acquiring the pumps for the five wells. I look forward to commissioning this system as your Prime Minister in 2026.

This financial year **we will start the civil engineering work for the J\$30 billion Pedro Plains Irrigation Scheme, which will benefit over 5000 farmers**. What we did for our farmers in Parnassus, Comma Pen, Downs, New Forrest, Amity Hall and Bridge Pen, we will now do for our farmers in the Pedro Plains.

**Madam Speaker**, as we look to the future of agriculture, investment in research and development is no longer optional—it is essential. To accelerate this transformation, **we are investing J\$6.3 billion over the next six years in the renovation of Bodles and other research stations**. We are also actively engaging in partnerships with global leaders in agricultural innovation, including India.

Our own institutions — The University of the West Indies (UWI), the College of Agriculture, Science and Education (CASE), and the University of Technology — will play a central role in advancing research tailored to Jamaica's unique landscape. To this end, we are converting CASE into a full agricultural-based university. The Government is also partnering with these institutions to share important scientific work such as strategies to improve soil quality.

**Madam Speaker**, this is a turning point. Agriculture must not be seen as an industry of hardship, but one of opportunity, investment, and national pride. We are ushering in a new era—where farmers are empowered, where food prices are fair, and where Jamaica is globally competitive.

## **Cultural, Creative and Entertainment Industries**

**Madam Speaker**, the cultural, creative and entertainment industries are cornerstones of Jamaica's informal economy, contributing significant income for many families. Madam Speaker, rest assured that the ASPIRE Growth strategy recognises the vital role of these industries and my Administration is committed to providing the resources to support and expand them.

Already, we are in collaboration with industry stakeholders to designate and renovate additional entertainment zones across the island. The first project in this initiative, Fort Rocky in Port Royal, hosted



its first major event, 'Good Times,' last Saturday, signalling its readiness as a premier entertainment venue. Port Royal itself is undergoing a transformative renaissance.



A once-forgotten location is now poised to become a major entertainment and events destination. The state-of-the-art floating cruise pier enables mid-sized ships to dock without disrupting the sensitive marine environment. Plans are underway to establish a dedicated food zone and more amenities for the public.

The HEART/NSTA Trust has also been supporting our creative and entertainment industries with a range of specialised training programmes designed to strengthen Jamaica's creative and cultural sectors. To date, HEART and partners have trained, assessed and certified 593 Jamaicans in cultural and artistic expressions, footwear construction, dance, DJs, beaded jewellery, and other areas. Under the Jamaica National Service Corps (JNSC) Programme 600 more candidates are scheduled to begin training in Jamaican culture and symbols at the end of this month.

**Madam Speaker**, this year we will expand our support.

### ***Cultural Apprenticeship Programme***

When I go into the communities across Jamaica and ask the young people what they want to do they tell me that they want to be an entertainer, a DJ, producer or another profession in the entertainment industry.

Young people, I hear you loud and clear. I am pleased to announce Jamaica's first-ever cultural apprenticeship programme. In a pilot starting in the upcoming fiscal year, 200 young people will receive preliminary creative and business training by HEART. But more importantly, **Madam Speaker**, we will

connect participants with local and international creatives (event planners, promoters, entertainers, artisans, sculptors, filmmakers, and context creators) for the completion of their training. While apprentices are being trained on the job they will be provided with a stipend of \$69,000 per month by the Trust. Furthermore, to ensure broad representation each Member of Parliament will be asked to nominate two (2) young persons for the programme.

**Madam Speaker**, this cultural apprenticeship programme will represent an unprecedented opportunity for the next generation of Jamaican creatives.

### ***Special Economic Zone for Creatives***

Furthering our commitment to the creative industries, in the 2025/2026 fiscal year, the Government will expand the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) framework to encompass music, film, and art production. This strategic move will provide tax incentives, infrastructure support, and streamlined regulatory processes to nurture our talent and attract investment from local and international players. The next generation of music producers and audio engineers will be able to import their equipment with lower duties. Artisans will receive support to export their creations to the world.

By integrating the creative industries into the SEZ framework, we anticipate robust growth in creative outputs, positioning Jamaica as a leading cultural hub and exporter in the region.

### ***Jamaica Screen Development Initiative (JSDI)***

**Madam Speaker**, you will recall the launch of the \$1 billion Jamaica Screen Development Initiative (JSDI) launched in 2024. I am pleased to announce that 406 applications were received from local film makers and 259 of these met the criteria for further evaluation. In fact, 7 projects have already been awarded film festival support, a further 9 films in progress will also be awarded support to complete their films. Just yesterday, another 51 films were selected for development funding, and evaluations for films at the production level will begin soon. This is the start of a burgeoning industry in Jamaica.

**Madam Speaker**, we can attract top-tier movie productions to Jamaica. We saw that with the Bob Marley movie produced by Paramount. For that film, over 1800 short-term jobs were created and US\$20 million was spent in country. JAMPRO is currently negotiating a co-production treaty with the Canada which will allow Canadian film makers to partner with Jamaican film makers to film in Jamaica. We are also pursuing similar arrangements with Nigeria, India, and South Africa.

**Madam Speaker**, with sound policies and funding, we will make movies for the world based on our culture, that are produced by Jamaicans at Jamaican facilities.

**Madam Speaker**, Jamaica has the greatest cultural potential in the world. Our people are extremely talented and as a government, we will unlock more of that talent.

## Financial Sector

**Madam Speaker**, I now turn to a critical enabler of our national Pivot to Growth —the Financial Sector. During the financial sector collapse in the 1990s, thousands of small and large businesses were closed, destroying thousands of lives. Thankfully, today our financial sector is strong and stable through the consistent efforts of successive administrations and the help of our international partners. Today, the strength of our financial sector is comparable to many globally and our capital markets are the strongest and most vibrant in the Caribbean. We now have an independent central bank, a deposit insurance scheme and other regulators who are independent of the executive arm of the Government.

Despite the strength of our financial sector and string regulation, there may be ad hoc institutional failures for various reasons. This is not unusual in any financial market, even in developed countries. The important thing is that the financial system as a whole is safe and sound. When there are failures, as in the case of SSL, it is the job of the relevant authorities to investigate and take the necessary actions to protect the creditors of a failed entity, and prosecute wrongdoers. It is important also to understand the reasons for the failure, learn from it and implement reforms to prevent a recurrence.

A strong and stable financial sector is a pivotal catalyst for the country's growth agenda. It provides the fuel that is needed to drive the engine of economic development and prosperity for our people. In this regard, it is important for this Government to look at reforms that safeguard the sector but also implement strategies that facilitate growth. Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance already announced that we will be reviewing the asset tax.

Today, I am announcing that the Government will undertake a comprehensive review of the financial sector, including capital standards, investment limits, and taxation burdens, to enhance the sector's capacity to support growth. The key objective is to unlock capital to drive the engine of growth forward — more lending to micro enterprises, more PPPs to drive investment in infrastructure, more investment in our growth sectors such as logistics, tourism linkages and agriculture. Most importantly, less bureaucracy and improved service for customers of financial institutions — for example, for the opening of accounts, particularly by those in the lower underserved sections of our economy. And yes, bank fees too!

## Social Safety Net

**Madam Speaker**, this Government is committed to ensuring that **no Jamaican is left behind**.

### ***\$1 Billion "Solidarity" Programme***

**Madam Speaker**, as we continue our mission to build a stronger and more inclusive Jamaica, we recognise that many of our citizens are in need but do not benefit from any existing government programme.



To address this, we are introducing the **\$1 billion “Solidarity” Programme, providing one-time cash grants of \$20,000 to 50,000 vulnerable individuals who are not enrolled in PATH, Social Pension, NIS, or the Reverse Income Tax Credit.**

This initiative will support elderly persons in need, youth not engaged in education or employment, microbusinesses affected by disaster, low-income informal workers, medically indigent individuals, and persons with disabilities facing economic hardship. Madam Speaker, we recognise that some of these persons may lack formal identification, and this may be a barrier to them participating in other social support programmes. The Government will assist them in obtaining birth certificates through the Operation Birthright Programme and securing a National Identification Card (NIDS) to facilitate their inclusion in future opportunities.

We are repurposing the online portal that was used for the CARE programme during the pandemic and applications will be made through this portal. Referrals will be managed through the Ministry of Labour and Social Security.

**Madam Speaker**, this government remains committed to uplifting every Jamaican — because true economic progress must leave no one behind.

## CONCLUSION

My fellow Jamaicans, in just a decade, we have transformed Jamaica from the brink of economic collapse into the strongest economy since our Independence. We have conquered the challenges of macroeconomic stability and debt reduction—hard-fought victories that have freed us from the cycle of crisis after crisis. It is now time for us to build on the strong foundation that we have created to focus on generating robust growth that will deliver more opportunities for all Jamaicans to pursue their God-given talents and fulfil their dreams and aspirations.

We are now ready to move to Jamaica’s Next Chapter which is about Accelerating Growth for Peace, Productivity and Prosperity. It means that the mother working tirelessly to provide for her children can look forward to greater opportunities and a better quality of life. It means that the young entrepreneur with big dreams will find the support to turn ideas into success. It means that every citizen — whether in the hills of St. Thomas, the streets of Kingston, or the fields of St. Elizabeth — will feel the impact of a government that is working for them. This next chapter is about building a Jamaica where hard work is rewarded, where dreams are nurtured, and where prosperity is not just for the few, but for all.

This next chapter will not unfold overnight. Just as it took years of discipline and sacrifice to secure our economic stability, achieving true economic independence and sustained growth will require continued focus, effort, and an unwavering commitment to national progress. But history has shown us that when we Jamaicans come together as one people, our resilience, determination, and spirit know no bounds.

**Madam Speaker**, this Government has never been about empty promises or mere talk — we have an unmatched track record of performance and results. When the world faced the worst global health and economic crisis in 100 years, it was this government that led Jamaica through the storm, protecting lives, safeguarding businesses, and ensuring that our economy rebounded stronger than ever. While many nations are still struggling, Jamaica stands strong, with record-low unemployment, the lowest debt in 50 years, robust reserves, and a stable, resilient economy that is delivering for the people.

**Madam Speaker**, while others are only talking, this government is working — because as **Proverbs 14:23** reminds us: "**All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.**"

The Jamaican people know who has delivered for them. The Jamaican people know who has steered this country through crises and into prosperity. Madam Speaker, the Jamaican people also know that our work is not yet done.

I call on all Jamaicans, at home and abroad, to **CHOOSE JAMAICA** and join us in writing Jamaica's next chapter. Let us together ASPIRE for the greatness that is the endowment of our forebears, the greatness we know we have always been capable of, the greatness that has defined us throughout history, and the greatness that will propel us into a future of boundless opportunity. Let us move forward, not just with hope, but with action. Let us not just dream with our eyes closed, but envision and create the future with our eyes open.

My fellow Jamaicans, now more than ever, I am convinced that Jamaica's best days are ahead of us. Thank you, and may God bless you all, and may God bless Jamaica, Land We Love.



GOVERNMENT OF JAMAICA



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