



LEADER OF THE
OPPOSITION

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MARK J.
GOLDING

THE ROAD TO CHANGE

MARK GOLDING, MP
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

BUDGET PRESENTATION 2024



SALUTATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with a sense of honour and humility that I rise today to make my third contribution to this budget Debate. Returning to this House each year for the past three years as Leader of the Opposition solidifies my commitment to the people of Jamaica.

I give thanks to Almighty God for all His blessings, and for the strength, wisdom and courage to continue to serve the people of Jamaica on the journey of national development. I invoke words from Psalm 46:1 - "God is our refuge and strength" - as I commit to stand up for, and stand with, the Jamaican people.

Every year this occasion reminds me that this journey of representation is not that is taken alone. My wife, my forever shining star, Sandra stands by my side and in my support, and I hail you today. Our children and the new delight of our lives, our first grandchild, stand as a reminder of the sense of family that is so important for the nation's development.

This occasion also reaffirms the great privilege it is for me to represent the constituents of South St. Andrew, without whom I would not be here. I thank the members of our constituency executive, many of whom are here today, for the great work they do in service to the people of South St. Andrew.

I must say a special word of congratulations and thanks to two wonderful ladies, Sarah Marshall and Louise Newland, who have been the CDF Officer and Secretary for the Constituency and provide amazing, dedicated support to the work of their Member of Parliament. On the 26th February 2024 they were both elected Councillors for the Trench Town and Admiral Town divisions respectively, doing so with great distinction as they came 1st and 3rd in voter support out of the entire 228 councillors across Jamaica in the recent Local Government Elections. Respect due!

Once again, as Party Leader I pay tribute to the team of patriots, my comrades in the People's National Party, who are dedicated to the defence of the interests of the people of Jamaica and building a better future for all our people. I wish to express my profound gratitude for your support.

I wish to thank my colleague Members of Parliament on both sides of the House for a vibrant year of engagement. Let us continue to relate with civility in this House, guided by a shared desire to serve our nation. I also wish to thank the Clerk and her team of staff here in Gordon House, who work steadfastly to support the work of the Nation's Parliament.

I particularly wish to thank the members on this side for their support, their solidarity and their guidance along our shared journey. Though only 14 out of 63 at this time, we likkle but we tallawah!

To our Senators and the other members of the Shadow Cabinet, their deputies and their Juniors, I acknowledge and thank you for your service and contribution. I have put together an amazing team of young and experienced Jamaicans, representative across the range of demographics and professions, who are focussed on the policies and programmes that will improve the quality of life of the Jamaican people.

For the past many months I have been along the highways and byways of Jamaica. I wish to express my

respect and thanks to the team of people within the People's National Party and the Office of the Leader of the Opposition who have supported that effort.

Jamaica has just completed the Local Government Elections, and I want to thank all the voters who came out and exercised their franchise in support of our democratic system of governance.

It is noteworthy and significant that, for all the talk about voter apathy, the total votes cast in this election increased by over 81,000 (or 15%), in excess of the votes cast in the 2016 Local Government Elections, moving from 545,571 in 2016 to 626,934 in 2024. Indeed, until we comprehensively clean up the voters list by a long-overdue reverification exercise, we will continue to under-rate and denigrate the vibrancy of our democracy in the prevailing narrative about voter participation.

I wish to congratulate all the Mayors and other Councillors island-wide, on both sides of our political system, who were successful in the recent elections, and I acknowledge those who were not elected for their courage and commitment in putting themselves forward.

I wish to especially thank the majority of elected Councillors who come from the People's National Party for their hard work, resilience and enthusiasm on the very long road leading to these elections. I also want to use the opportunity to assure them that their work has just begun, and that we are expecting a high level of representation, accountability and transparency in their conduct of the people's business.

Similarly, the Mayors in the seven local authorities now under our jurisdiction have their marching orders. We published a strong and forward-thinking manifesto, and I expect them to ensure that these commitments are kept, and to start implementation right away. We will be happy to share those ideas with the other seven Mayors, as we want to see good governance and even development in the local authorities right across the country.

And finally, all the people of Jamaica who showed us that you are ready, again, to listen to what we have to offer; who demonstrated a growing belief that better must come; who came out and provided a popular majority in support of our Party, we thank you for your expression of confidence in us, and we look forward to engaging further in the year to come. We not only listened; we have learned.

I learned that we have a very aware and astute electorate who have come to see this Government for what it is. Some are still cautious, but most are resolved. Who feels it, knows it. The people of Jamaica want CHANGE.



ECONOMY & BUDGET REVIEW

Today:

1. I will remind Jamaicans of some of the context in which this budget has been crafted.
2. I will then address some real challenges that I found in the budget, as presented.
3. Then I am going to provide you with some of the concrete plans we will implement when we come to service as a government.

I do this knowing that Jamaicans have seen the light. They know we will be coming back to implement. The people of Jamaica know that there is one thing about ideas... they are best implemented by the people who come up with them.

It is time for CHANGE.... And that is where we are going. We are on the road to CHANGE!

Budget 24/25 - The Foundation Where We Are

I sat through the four and a half hour presentation of the Finance Minister and am more convinced than ever that this Government does not have any intention of tackling the fundamental challenges facing our country. With them, Jamaica will continue along its current path, and the frustrations and hopelessness of the majority of our people will continue to grow.

The 2024/2025 budget is yet another 'tinkering' budget not grounded in a vision of development for the Jamaican people. According to their economic model, something will trickle down to the farmer, the teacher, the nurse and the sanitation worker, the hairdresser and the taximan. After eight years, they want Jamaicans to wait even longer for the trickle that might come.

Much of what was presented, we have heard before:

We had heard so much of it before:

- The six-story hospital UWI was first announced in 2015 by Fenton Ferguson - the Minister of Finance seems to have found the plan in 2020 hence the recent re-announcement.
- The Jamworld and Fort Rocky entertainment zone projects have been announced and re-announced several times. In fact Fort Rocky was named Jamaica's First Entertainment Zone Oct 2017
- The customs duty changes were announced on another stage last November.
- The new garbage trucks and buses were announced in 2020 to much fanfare and ribbon cutting.

Meanwhile, Jamaicans are crying that times are too hard, the cost of living is too high and their wages are too low. Young people are crying out for opportunities to further their education, and for better job options. Citizens are crying 'no' to corruption and deception, and 'yes' to transparency and truth. In terms of broken promises and deception, who can forget:

- 5% growth in 4 years
- An Impeachment Bill in the first 100 days
- Fixed election dates

- And Jamaica's greatest wish - sleeping with our windows and doors open.

And the new ones that emerged during the Local Government Election, like converting Clarkes Town into a city, or Portmore into Little Miami, are mere pie-in-the-sky ideas masquerading as a vision for national development.

We live in a country where there is:

- Increasing doubt in impartiality of our institutions
- Increasing reports of fear of victimisation by Jamaicans not aligned to the government
- Entrenched apathy with Jamaican nationals losing hope, who feel as if there is no recourse, no justice and no point in participating in the political systems or exercising their franchise
- Clouds of uncertainty and concern regarding the rights and freedoms of Jamaican citizens, on a range of issues from beach access to States of Emergency
- Absence of accountability for wrongdoers aligned to the government
- And the militarisation of the Constabulary

All of this is the manifestation of a tendency towards autocratic rule that I have spoken about year after year, right here in this Budget Presentation. That is the untenable foundation upon which this country is being run. The main idea of this budget exercise was 'leveraging economic stability'.

But that is not something they can claim ownership of. That was a seed that was sown and nurtured by the People's National Party while in government, after the chaos brought about by the JLP Administration of 2007-2011.

Leveraging Economic Stability

- During the 2007 to 2011 period, the JLP government had abandoned the IMF programme in a wanton act of fiscal irresponsibility, leaving Jamaica on the edge of a precipice and staring at disaster. When coming to office in 2012, Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller leveraged her many years of hard-earned political capital and laid it on the line to lobby the international financial community to give Jamaica another chance.

This was only possible because of the sacrifices of the Jamaican people who were willing to walk the walk because they trusted her not to sell them out. This is what saved our country from the ruin the previous Government had brought us to. **We pulled the country out of the mire of fiscal irresponsibility!**

- With Dr. Peter Phillips as Finance Minister, the Portia Simpson Miller Administration steadfastly prepared the ground in which the tree of fiscal responsibility was sown for Jamaica. We got the country's public finances back on track, transforming the tax system and implementing other critical structural reforms along the difficult journey of getting our national debt under control. In 2016, you inherited that tree when its roots were already firmly in place and it was already bearing the fruit of fiscal stability.

This is the foundation of the twelve years of economic stability that Jamaica has benefited from.

We taught you about fiscal responsibility, on which economic stability is built!

- In that period, I was tasked with responsibility for delivering the extensive legislation that was required to achieve that durable fiscal responsibility, a modernised revenue system and the other basic building blocks of economic stability. Yes, the same tree of economic stability you are shading under now - we nurtured its early growth and made sure there could be no turning back. **We led the way on fiscal responsibility!**

- You, the JLP, mocked us whilst we were planting and nurturing that tree of fiscal responsibility. “All you do is pass IMF tests”, you said it in 2015. You forget? **So don't lecture us about fiscal responsibility and economic stability. No Sanky no Sing So.**

We took the hard decisions and implemented them. You inherited a situation that we had fixed for Jamaica. You have spent eight years ‘leveraging’ our hard work and the fiscal responsibility we left.

We on this side have no plans to cut down that tree of fiscal responsibility. It is a tree that I helped to plant and nurture.

But we also recognize that 2024 is not 2012, and the challenges and priorities are now different. Economic stability is not sufficient to meet the needs and expectations of the Jamaican people. The people need Jamaica to shift gear to something much better than what is going on now. The people want to see real change. Jamaica now needs a government that can take the country on the road to change.

You say you are leveraging stability for all the people...but I must ask you, which people? Workers, who are reeling from the high prices that keep going up? Farmers, who are struggling against so many challenges? Civil Servants, Teachers and Doctors, who feel disrespected?

What you are saying and what people are feeling are not matching up. Who is really benefiting from the stability you say you are leveraging?

If you look at the 24/25 budget, the picture becomes clear. Let's do this together.

Budget 24/25 - Who Benefits?

The so-called 'Reverse Tax Credit'

In his opening budget speech last Tuesday, the Minister announced a giveaway of \$20,000 for employees and self-employed persons earning up to \$3 million who are in the formal tax system, which he gave the fancy name “reverse tax credit”. He said that the objective of it is to incentivize on-time filing and paying statutory deductions.

However, that objective is really questionable, because to qualify for this he says you have to become fully compliant for the 2023 tax year by March 31, 2024. That deadline is less than two weeks away. Therefore, as a practical matter, it is most unlikely that anyone who is not already tax compliant will get the benefit. Furthermore, it is wishful thinking that a single payment of \$20,000 will induce anyone who is now outside the tax system to take steps to bring themselves into it and start paying taxes. And it applies to persons below the threshold. The truth is, this tax so-called “reverse tax credit” smells like a \$20,000 giveaway for political advantage as we get ever closer to the next general election.

There is also another angle to this. The Minister said that for an employee to be entitled to receive that reverse tax credit, his or her employer must have been fully compliant in making the statutory filings and payments for statutory deductions and employer contributions for 2023 by March 31, 2024.

Now I must ask the question – is this fair? How is it fair to an employee to deny him or her this little benefit, in the event that the employer is not compliant with its statutory filings and payments for statutory deductions and employer contributions. Many businesses are now reeling from the increase in interest rates and are facing cash flow difficulties, so many of those employers may be behind in tax filings and payments for statutory deductions and employer contributions. The employee should not be blamed or penalised for this.

Minister, an employee earning under \$3,000,000 should get this benefit, whatever the tax status of his or her employer. In your estimate of \$11.4 billion for this relief you have assumed that 570,000 persons will be able to access it, so don't deny anyone the benefit on the grounds that their employer is delinquent. To do that is simply unfair.

Jamaica needs thoughtful governance. That's why we are on the road to CHANGE.

The Threshold of Disappointment

During the recent Local Government Election campaign, the Prime Minister promised that the income tax threshold would be increased, in what he said would be a “1.5 2.0”. Last September, I had called for an increase in the threshold to \$3 million, to restore the real value of the \$1.5 million of 2016, and to provide some buffer for future inflation. That fact is that, since 2016, accumulated inflation is over 46% in Jamaica, and an increase is required to restore the real value of the threshold that was last reset in 2016.

After the Prime Minister’s grand election pronouncement of a “1.5 2.0”, persons are understandably very disappointed that the Minister has announced an increase of the threshold to only \$1.7 million. What they expected to be 2.0 million ended up being 0.2 million. This translates to a mere \$4,166 more per month in their take-home pay.

If the Minister had, as Phase 1 of restoring the value of the \$1.5, even increased the threshold to \$2 million, that would give persons an additional \$125,000 per year (\$10,400 per month) in their take-home pay. That would be a much more meaningful benefit. And it could be paid for using the \$11.4 billion that has been allocated to the one-time \$20,000 so-called “reverse tax credit”. In getting to \$3.0 million, as tax inflows continue to grow the threshold can be again adjusted as Phase Two.

Madam Speaker, Jamaica needs caring governance. That’s why we are on the road to CHANGE.

No ‘New’ But Much ‘More’ Taxes

I want to say something more about taxes. The Minister likes to make a song-and-dance about no new taxes imposed since over \$30 billion of new taxes was imposed in the first two years of the JLP Government elected in 2016. However, it is important to recognize that the taxes being collected from the Jamaican people have risen dramatically under this Government.

FY	Tax Collected (J\$mn)	Increase over prior FY (J\$mn)	Increase over prior FY (%)	GDP (J\$bn)	Tax as % of GDP
2015/16	411,854	40,977	11	1,687,400	24.4
2021/22	616,368	110,681	22	2,322,000	26.5
2022/23	752,841	136,473	22	2,751,900	27.4
2023/24	856,372	103,531	14	3,047,400	28.1
2024/25	924,376	68,004	8	3,289,800	28.1
TOTAL		418,689			

In FY 2015/16, which was the final year of the last PNP Administration, the tax collected was J\$411.8 Billion, which was 24% of GDP.

The above Table shows how much more tax is being collected under the current JLP Administration. Tax collected is now over 28% of GDP. Jamaicans are taxed much more under this JLP Government!

Over the four FYs 2021/22 through 2024/25, tax collections have increased by **J\$419 Billion. J\$419 Billion of additional taxes has been collected from the Jamaican people collected over the past four years!**

That is an increase of **66%**, which is way more (in fact, more than double) the accumulated inflation of **31%** over that four-year period.

Looking at tax collection from the perspective of each Jamaican, since this JLP Government came to office they have **more than doubled** the annual tax take from every man, woman and child in Jamaica, increasing it by a massive \$190,000 per person (to total \$342,000 per person of taxation in the 2024/25 Budget).

So much for “no new taxes” sankey! No new taxes, but much, much more taxes! And as the recent election shows, who feels it knows it.

Jamaica really needs honest Governance, that’s why we are on the road to CHANGE.

Removal of GCT, for Whom?

The Minister says that he is going to take away the protection for our farmers by removing GCT from the importation of raw produce. He says Jamaica is on the cusp of being “blacklisted” by the World Trade Organization (WTO) if we continue to protect our farmers.

Based on our research, the WTO does not blacklist or unilaterally punish member states for non-compliance. Instead, an aggrieved member state must first enter into consultations with a non-compliant member state to seek changes in the offending measure, or to win concessions before requesting the establishment of a panel to settle the dispute. The panel will thereafter issue a report, which can subsequently be appealed before the WTO’s Appellate Body. The Minister therefore needs to state whose bidding he is doing.

In recent years, tensions in the US-China relations and Russia-EU sanctions resulting from the war in Ukraine, have adversely affected the working of the WTO. For some time now, the WTO has not had a functioning dispute settlement mechanism, since the US decided not to appoint members of the appellate body.

Furthermore, the recently concluded MC-13 meeting of Trade Ministers in Abu Dhabi has left a number of critical issues unresolved, including subsidies in agriculture and fisheries by developed countries, reforms in the dispute settlement mechanism, and other long-outstanding issues for the benefit of small and vulnerable economies like Jamaica.

In this context, we must question why the Minister finds it necessary to proceed down this path, instead of entering into negotiations with an aggrieved party, as provided for under the WTO rules.

The Minister was also vague on the scope of this announced measure. What exactly are the imported raw food items for which GCT will be removed? I note that under the GCT Act (Third Schedule, Part 1, paragraph 6) the category of “raw foodstuff” is extremely wide, and specifically includes fresh fruit and vegetables,

ground provisions, legumes, onions and garlic, meat, poultry and fish.

The removal of this protection leaves our farmers very exposed to unfair competition from importers, who have little risk. We know that the rich countries in North America and Europe provide massive subsidies to their agricultural sector, distorting fair competition and giving food imports from those countries an advantage over Jamaican producers.

Over the past 15 years, Jamaica's food imports have seen a steady increase, reaching over US\$1.4 billion in 2022, according to the Statistical Institute of Jamaica (STATIN). In contrast, agricultural exports lagged far behind, at US\$273 million in the same year. This is a growing trend, and it underscores the vulnerability of local food production.

Local farmers already contend with high overhead costs, including GCT on input farm supplies, which producers in other countries do not face. Jamaican farmers also have other disadvantages, including their small scale, reliance on rainfall rather than irrigation systems, and limited access to mechanisation and financial resources. In 2022, loans allocated to farming operations amounted to a mere J\$146.3 million. The removal of GCT on imported foodstuff will worsen this imbalance between locally produced and imported foods. This move is likely to adversely impact the sector and the livelihood of farmers, while undermining rural communities, who are the breadbasket of our country.

Only last year we saw how the onion farmers in St. Thomas were hurt badly when import permits were granted to importers who flooded the market with foreign onions, leaving our farmers with produce that they could not sell.

In removing the GCT on the import of produce, nothing has been put in place to protect our farmers from the wave of imports of produce that will now come into the market without paying GCT.

Indeed, there is a common theme here. When I was in St. Elizabeth recently, the fishermen were complaining bitterly that they cannot sell their lobster because big players are supplying the market at low prices and squeezing out from their livelihoods. Their MP is Minister of Agriculture & Fisheries, yet they are suffering. The Government is letting them down badly, and it is a crying shame.

There is also a critical necessity for transparency in the allocation of permits from the importation of foods, to ensure that there is proper consideration for local production capacity, and to eliminate the possibility for nepotism, cronyism and other forms of corruption.

The Jamaica Agricultural Society (JAS) was apparently not consulted with before this measure was announced by the Minister, which in itself is an egregious example of arrogant and uncaring governance.

Who benefits? Certainly not the farmers, so who?

We have consulted with the farming community and have developed a raft of measures that can mitigate against what could turn out to be a heinous and misguided action - if the farmers of Jamaica are to get a

fair deal.

- Simultaneously Remove GCT from farm input supplies, including essential planting materials such as seeds, farm tools, and equipment, to incentivize local producers and strengthen their sustainability.
- Remove GCT from local food products, such as table eggs, to make them affordable, stimulate demand and bolster local production.
- Enhance transparency in food imports, by making the grant of import permits subject to parliamentary approval, and by requiring that import permits be allocated by an equitable and transparent process such as a public auction.
- Until protective measures like those already mentioned are put in place and are working effectively, replace the GCT on imported foodstuff with a stamp duty on imported foodstuffs, to level the playing field between imported and locally produced foods and discourage over-reliance on imports.

It takes a little care to find solutions, some empathy and some will. Jamaica needs open, prudent governance. That's why we are on the road to CHANGE.

Tax Breaks

The Minister announced various tax breaks for the coming fiscal year, totalling \$25.12 billion. Many no doubt expect that these tax breaks will be an annual cost to the budget, going forward.

However, the Minister has not provided the country with any clear and sustainable plan to finance these tax breaks in future years. To the contrary, we were told by him last Tuesday that this \$25.12 billion annual cost is to be entirely paid for in FY 2024/25 by a one-off securitization of some receivables. He has not said what those receivables are, and when

I asked him about this after his speech, but his response was that the information is “market sensitive”. That is totally unacceptable. The country must be told exactly how these tax breaks are to be financed, in the coming fiscal year and thereafter.

The public may well be asking what is a securitization of receivables? Simply put, it is a transaction where the government raises money now by selling sources of revenue that will be earned in years to come. This means that a future government will not have access to those sources of revenue, because this government will have sold it off this year to fund its budget, and left the cupboard dry.

So who is benefiting from this, certainly not the majority of the people of Jamaica, so who? Who?

A More Reasonable Deadline for Filing Taxes

Minister, the current 15th March deadline is pretty rough on everyone who has to file their taxes. Getting the past year's accounts audited, and then preparing the tax returns, all by the 15th March, is really too much of a crunch. An April deadline could ease the pressure significantly. It's time for a change.

Other countries have later deadlines, which helps with their budgeting and financial planning. Why not take a leaf out of their book? It would give taxpayers who file more time to get their taxes right, and would improve the accuracy of tax filings. It also improves compliance, by allowing a more reasonable deadline. It would be a step towards a stronger, more stable economy.

You were on board with this back in 2021-2022, but you have become noticeably silent since then on this issue. It's high time we saw some action on this.

Photocopy Government

On several occasions, including in my budget presentations in 2021, 2022 and 2023, I called for the total removal of the requirement for guarantors to access a student loan. The data I had seen showed that the collection from these guarantors was minimal, but there was evidence to show that the requirement to provide guarantors made student loans inaccessible to many students, and students from low income families in particular. That is why I repeatedly called for the requirement of guarantors to be abolished overall.

I am therefore happy that the Minister has finally heeded the call, and removed the requirement for guarantors of student loans for everyone. It is yet another example of how good things happen when this Government listens to the Opposition. And it shows how much better it will be when this Opposition becomes the Government.

It reminds me of my call, in last year's budget debate, for an increase to US\$150 in the duty free allowance for online shoppers, which the Minister later adopted (in part) when he announced the increase to US\$100 at the JLP conference in November.

Jamaica needs a CHANGE in the current approach to Economic Development.

The Current Approach to Economic Development

In the just completed local government elections, the Prime Minister argued that the people must not vote with their emotions. He said they should pay attention to all the positive macro-economic indicators that mean that things are good. He said they should hold on, and stay the course, because Jamaica will soon take off.

But the people showed with their votes that they are not convinced. They are not convinced, because the economic model of this government benefits the few. Indeed, the people cried out with their ballots that a better way exists, and that better must come.

Under the current socio-economic model being pursued by this Government, inequality of wealth and income will remain entrenched in Jamaican society. Jamaica is 99 of 163 countries worldwide in terms of commitments to reduce inequality, according to Oxfam. On the 2022 World Inequality Index, Jamaica's wealth gap is shown to be as wide as Haiti's. In Jamaica, the top 1% control 20% of national wealth and the top 10% control 50%.

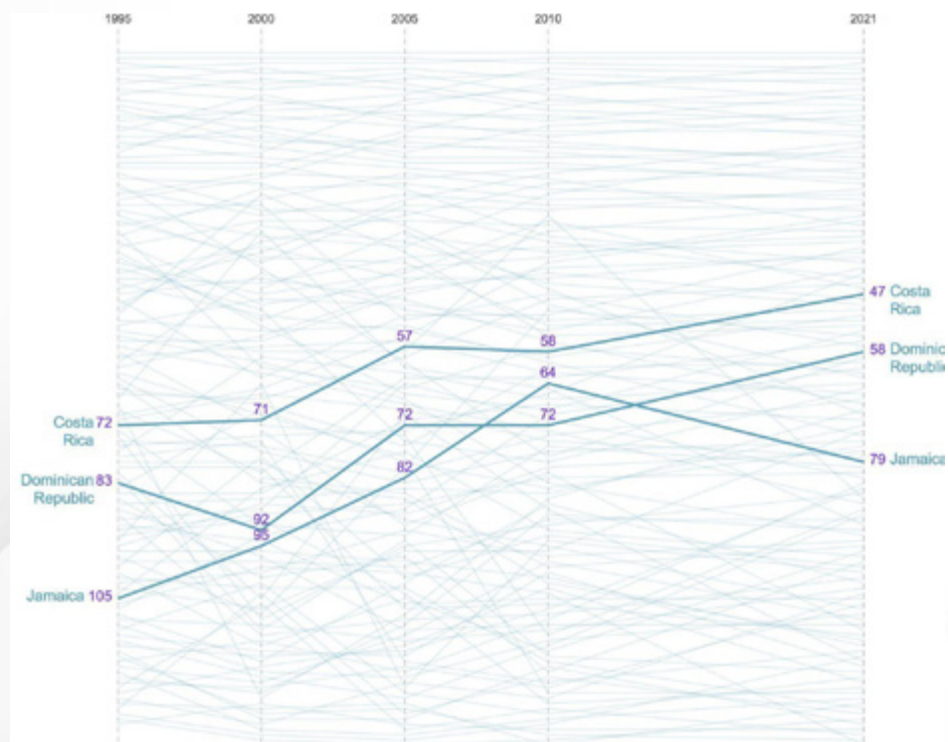
The Jamaica Survey of Living Conditions 2021 (the most current available to us) says that there has been an upward movement in both poverty and inequality under this JLP Government. It says - “The prevalence of poverty increased to 16.7% from 11.0% in 2019”, and that - “Inequality increased with the Gini coefficient [the standard measurement of inequality] at 0.3991 from 0.3671 in 2019”. So I wonder, where in this has economic performance been leveraged for the people?

With inflation running hot and the cost of living increasing by 30% since then, the situation no doubt remains dire. In short, the people a feel it, the way this Government a deal wid it.

The Minister announced that GDP per capita in Jamaica is now US\$7,000. He didn’t mention that GDP per capita data doesn’t show inequality. He didn’t mention that poverty is 4 times the rate of unemployment. And he didn’t mention that Trinidad & Tobago, Barbados and Guyana are all at around US\$20,000 per capita, compared to our US\$7,000.

For Jamaica to move our GDP from US\$7,000 to US\$20,000 over the next 15 years or so will require an average real GDP growth of 7% each year. Until we start to put things in place to achieve that level of inclusive, sustainable growth, the talk of prosperity is a deception and an illusion.

The concept of Economic Complexity measures the extent to which knowledge drives high value-added economic activity in a country. It is a strong indicator of an economy’s capacity to achieve higher levels of economic growth.



This chart, taken from the Harvard Economic Complexity Ranking, compares the economic complexity trends in Jamaica, the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica. Jamaica's descent between 2010 and 2021 is indicative of our failure to build a model of socio-economic development that can transition from a raw materials/raw services economy to one of a different level of sophistication producing high value-added goods and services.

Under the current model being pursued by this Government, inequality of wealth and income will remain entrenched in Jamaican society for years to come. We must transition Jamaica from a low wage, low tech, low growth economy to one which achieves the high levels of inclusive, sustainable growth that can meet the needs and aspirations of our people.

This is the clear metric telling us that CHANGE is not only required but urgent!

We on this side are not deceived. We are on the ground, where the people are feeling the pressure. Even though this Government likes to tell the people to take responsibility for their actions, it is not very good at taking its own advice. Though the world has moved on, they are still stuck in trickle-down neoliberal economics, where support is given at the top of the economy, and the people must wait for prosperity to trickle down.

That model depends on low wages. It thrives on low levels of education. It pushes people into scamming. It pushes people into hustling for a living. It causes hard-working and unemployed people alike to rely on remittances from their family abroad. It forces people to migrate. If we are exporting our skills, what are we left with? It depends on the people being deceived. But we are not deceived. Nor are we deceivers. So it is now quite clear that there was nothing in the Minister's budget presentation that suggests that this Government has a coherent strategy for achieving this. Wild campaign promises, like converting Clarks Town into a city, are mere pie-in-the-sky ideas masquerading as a vision of national development.

I will now present some elements of our comprehensive, holistic plan for the sustainable, inclusive development of Jamaica and our people. The plans of the next Jamaican Government...on the road to change.



**THE
ROAD TO
C.H.A.N.G.E.**

Madam Speaker,

Since I last addressed this Honourable House, we have been progressively developing our plans for Jamaica which are grounded in our core beliefs of social justice, equality and good governance.

- Last year in my contribution to this Budget debate I spoke about some of the prevailing challenges that were at the forefront of the minds of the Jamaican people. Constitutional reform, the need for government with integrity were areas I emphasised.

We called upon the government to repair the breach with regards to the expectations of Jamaicans with regards to land, education, securing our people, social transformation, health, energy and food security. We remain true to those core tenets of our national development strategy.

- I was tactical and practical when I named our new Shadow Cabinet. I designed a governance structure that is fit for purpose. I created four new policy clusters, bringing a solutions-based approach to the changes we want to see in our Nation.

- Then, in preparation for the Local Government Election we laid out our agenda for CHANGE at the community, divisional and municipal levels. The people of Jamaica responded positively to the CHANGE agenda on February 26. That plan is now being put in action, and we are putting in place a monitoring and evaluation mechanism to drive that CHANGE is made.

- At the national level, our policies and programmes must be consistent with the core values of our party - social justice, inclusion and transparency.

We have crafted a raft of practical measures and a national CHANGE approach. It emphasises:

- **Communication, care and culturally sensitive implementation;**
- **Honesty and openness**
- **Accessibility and Inclusiveness**
- **New policy approaches**
- **Good governance, and**
- **Engagement and Empowerment of all our people**

Today, I will share a selection of those measures. They stand on two pillars - **The Economic Model of the next PNP Government** and our grounding in and commitment to **Good Governance**.

Our Economic Model

Madam Speaker

The time has come for us to centre the needs of the people in a transformational economic model. The time has come for broadening the wealth and ownership base of the society, to tackle the chronic scourge of deep inequality. We must do what is required for high levels of inclusive, sustainable growth to meet the needs and aspirations of our people.

The emphasis on inclusive and sustainable growth is important. The fruits of economic expansion must be equitably shared across the society, and the investments made must be compatible with our natural assets to preserve our environment for the benefit of future generations.

Jamaicans don't want economic stability that only trickles down into low growth and diminishing prospects. They want to be able to afford an education, get a decent job or build a thriving business, and own a home. This is why we must transition Jamaica from a low wage, low tech, low growth economy. We must transition from an excessive dependence on remittances to earnings from high value exports of goods and services. We must give people alternatives to unlawful economic activities. Indeed, the structure of our economy must nurture public safety, not criminality.

Everyone must understand that they have a role to play in making Jamaica a nice place to live. That means people must pay their fair share of taxes, and the Government must be accountable to the people because it is spending the people's money. Spending must prioritise access to basic needs, giving people an opportunity for entrepreneurialism to thrive, giving people an education from which they can create new ideas and opportunities, and nurturing our indigenous talent. The type of transformation that Jamaica needs will require investment in the people, and in possibilities for the people.

The major impediments to Jamaica achieving high levels of inclusive, sustainable growth include:

- a failing education system and a training system that is not fit for purpose, which contribute to Jamaica's low national productivity;
- high levels of violent crime;
- high electricity costs that undermine the competitiveness of our economy; and
- insufficient economic diversification to increase our resilience to the growing threats from climate-related and other external shocks.

None of these challenges can be successfully tackled if we do not address the prevailing failures of governance. Until the systems of governance are accountable, transparent and participatory, 'dawg nyam we suppa'

Priority Actions

Social Cohesion and Empowerment

I believe that we all, as Jamaicans, are responsible for creating the Jamaica we want to see, and establishing a 'livity' of the Jamaicans we want to be.

That is why our focus is Social Cohesion and Empowerment. This portfolio cluster will focus on transformation, productivity and access, by addressing the ways in which health and wellness; social transformation and social protection; gender; young people and civil society; persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups, will not only be engaged but energised and empowered. Human Capital Development is highest on our list. It is what we mean when we say We Put People First; we believe in People Power, we Balance the Books while Balancing Peoples' Lives.

Human Capital Development

The next PNP government is committed to implementing measures to ensure that Jamaica's human capital has the capacities and skills to participate competitively in a high value-added economic environment, which can support the required investments to build that environment and deliver high levels of inclusive, sustainable growth. The crisis in education and training must be tackled and overcome, if this is to be achieved.

We see education in a holistic way. The education system should be socialising our people towards the kind of society we want to live in. 100% literacy and numeracy must be the target for national transformation. And there is food insecurity in Jamaica, so we cannot avoid dealing with children's nutrition. The system must invest in teachers, as well as infrastructure and technology, and in support services for parenting. We feel no shame about the fact that the majority of students speak Jamaican first, and we think it should be central to how they learn - as Professor Don Robotham recently put it - "We must meet our children where they are and teach English as the foreign language it is."

Though we must prioritise the early childhood and primary school system to raise standards there, especially in basic literacy and numeracy, we also believe in tertiary education. And we also believe education must be lifelong, to address gaps and reskilling at the adult levels.

In the areas of education and training, these are some of our proposals:

- We will make investments in teacher training and compensation, in infrastructure and technology, and in support services for parenting.
- We will expand and improve the school feeding programme to ensure adequate and proper nutrition and encourage school attendance.
- We will prioritise the early childhood and primary school system to raise standards, eliminate the major existing literacy and numeracy deficits.

- We will prioritise STEAM education across the education system.
- We will provide one full scholarship for a university degree per family.
- We will remove taxes from laptops and tablets for students, and provide every teacher with a laptop.

For teachers we will

- Provide them with student debt reductions and motor vehicle concessions which increase with their years of service.
- Provide teachers with enhanced access to NHT loans and priority in housing allocations in NHT-financed schemes.
- Provide teachers with a package deal, to be negotiated by Government, for free internet service as a tool of trade.

For Young People

- We will incentivise youths to invest in their education by capping their monthly student loan payments at a reasonable percentage of their actual income, so that in times when the borrower is not working those payments are deferred and tagged to the back end of the loan without penalties.
- We will reinvigorate and repurpose HEART to be a major player in a wider project to prepare the workforce for the current and emerging employment opportunities in the 21st century, including by building training partnerships with the private sector.

Our Nation's training capacity must be as relevant and fit-for-purpose as possible, in a rapidly evolving economy that we must build. We will create a series of Workforce Development Training Partnerships with the private sector, to develop a competitively market-driven approach to training the workforce.

This market-driven approach leverages the training capacity of all public sector and private sector tertiary education and training institutions. The objective is to increase the national capacity to deliver a transformational impact to the economy through an up-skilled workforce, in the shortest possible time. We will welcome the participation of trade unions and employer associations in these partnerships. We need all hands on deck to transition our economy to high value-added goods and services.

HEART will support private sector-led investments in training by matching grants of 50% of the cost of any employer-identified, third party-delivered training programme that improves the performance or wellbeing of the employer's staff. This approval would be automatic up to an amount equal to 90% of that employer's, and its employees', annual contributions to HEART, and if the need is larger, then it can be approved on the basis of established, transparent priorities.

For curriculum strengthening in civics

- We will provide incentives to encourage employers to establish internship programmes that build the needs of their business and industry into the course offerings of tertiary and skills-training institutions.
- We will utilise the school infrastructure to enhance training both to school children and the surrounding communities.

- We will entrench civics education as a core subject in the national curriculum, to equip our students for active and productive citizenship with an understanding of the constitution and their rights, with social skills based on wholesome values and attitudes
- We will build the teachings of the Rt. Excellent Marcus Mosiah Garvey into the school curriculum at all levels on an age-appropriate basis, to encourage self-belief, personal responsibility and self-actualization in the Nation's youth.
- We will establish a National Research & Development (R&D) Council bringing all relevant institutions together from within the State, Academia, the Private Sector and the Trade Unions to develop, monitor and evaluate a national R&D strategy.
- We will provide for the accelerated tax write-off of expenditure on R&D to encourage greater private investment in innovation that ties agriculture to manufacturing, science, technology and advancing the labour force.

Human capital development is directly linked to citizen security. It is about developing an aware, thoughtful and thinking society that can access a wide range of opportunities, locally and globally, with not only the skills but also the values and attitudes that promote national development.

Citizen Security

The very high level of violent crime in Jamaica continues to demoralise our Nation, discourage investment, increase the costs of medical care and reduce our capacity to achieve high levels of inclusive, sustainable economic growth.

I have emphasised that we see education as a means to reduce the levels of violence and crime in our society. I am making the broader point that to make Jamaica a safe country in which to live, work, raise families and do business, a different approach must be taken to national security (or, as we prefer to call it, citizen security), coupled with a concerted thrust for social transformation.

We prefer to think about citizen security because it forces us to think of people's needs. Our people deserve respect. It shows us for instance that road safety is a citizen security issue - if roads are potholed and motorists are forced to swerve out of sequence, all people using the roads are at risk. If street lights don't work, it compromises women's sense of safety. If militarization is the way forward, we will see more and more videos of masked policemen with long guns hauling intimidating and abusing citizens. That's not the Jamaica we want. We cannot build a future and a nation by locking down under-served communities. There is a better way to make Jamaica safe for all.

These are some of our proposals for making Jamaica a safe society for us all:

- We will revitalise the Peace Management Initiative to build a network in all of the violence-prone communities across the country, rolling out restorative justice, mediation and other conflict resolution techniques at the community level.
- We will train and empower 500 violence interrupters across Jamaica.
- We will partner with the Private Sector and other stakeholders to expand Project Star into a truly national programme, including access to training, mentorship, remedial education and job placements for youths at risk.
- We will enact legislation that targets the known vicious purveyors of criminal violence across Jamaica and brings them to justice, including a Court-supervised process of pre charge detention that targets persons on whom there is credible intelligence to facilitate building viable cases that can result in successful prosecution.
- We will bring much greater focus to reforming the prison system to reduce the high level of recidivism by rehabilitating offenders to become productive citizens rather than reoffenders when they return to society.
- We will provide the police force with vehicles, equipment and training needed to efficiently respond to, investigate and prosecute offenders.
- We will build out the Jamaica Eye system of cameras to enhance citizen security and ensure greater accountability for criminal behaviour

- We will provide mental health support, including adequate rest, to our law enforcement officers, to help them cope with the difficulties of their work in Jamaica.
- We will partner with NGOs to support well-designed, sustainable community-based interventions that focus on anger-management, parenting skills, conflict resolution and overall civility, and substantially increase the number of social workers to take on these critical tasks and build social cohesion within communities.

Labour

We recognize that crime and other socially negative behaviour emerge from the imbalanced structure of our society. This is why we prioritise social justice and workers' rights as an essential part of the role of government.

As a society with a history of oppression of our people, we must be ever-mindful of the need to build healthy employment relations. That includes how the government treats the civil service. Government should set the example for how all other employers treat workers. At a most basic level, we will approach all negotiations with public sector workers with respect, openness and a spirit of partnership.

The Government has been boasting of low unemployment, when many of those jobs are below the International Labour Organization's standard of decent work. Many young persons are frustrated and are no longer looking for a job. Low unemployment exists alongside high underemployment, with hundreds of thousands of Jamaicans of working age staying outside the workforce, unwilling to work for wages that cannot sustain them with a decent quality of life.

We see workers across the economy working for years under fixed term contracts, and the Government will not address this structural inequity afflicting our labour market. We have a Labour Market Reform report which focuses on productivity improvements, but it has been left in File 13. We need to advance from a minimum wage system to a liveable wage system, and that needs to be tied to increased productivity to be sustainable.

The next PNP Govt will introduce structural reforms that balance the interest of employers and workers to bring about productivity, equity and decent work. Our Government will seek to ensure that the workers of Jamaica are respected and their rights are protected.

These are some of our proposals:

- We will approach all negotiations with public sector workers and their representatives with respect, openness and a spirit of partnership.
- We will enact comprehensive legislation to eliminate abusive contractual arrangements which circumvent employment rights, right across the economy. The slow, incremental process of eliminating this practice from the public sector, thrust on this Government by the ruling of the court

affecting security guards, is just not enough. We will ensure the equal treatment of all workers, regardless of the legal form of their contracts.

- We will pursue the establishment of Joint Industrial Councils in industries where there are high levels of employment but there is no common standard for working conditions and no union representation. The security guard industry, the tourism industry and the global services industry (BPO) are cases in point.
- We will review the incentive legislation for Employee Share Ownership Plans to make it user-friendly and easy to comply with and administer, followed by a promotional exercise to encourage Jamaican firms to establish Employee Share Ownership Plans which align employer and employee interests and create wealth for their workers at all levels, from the bearer and the janitor to the CEO.
- We will establish a Commission to examine the dire situation now faced by communities in former sugar areas, and to develop a comprehensive plan for the economic revitalization of those areas.
- We will put in place proper and dignified relocation arrangements for the families of former sugar workers

These priority areas will all be built out using social transformation and social protection interventions, techniques and measures, and will be linked into health and wellness strategies. They will be informed by gender considerations, and directly address the needs of Persons with Disabilities, with inclusion being a guiding principle.

Social cohesion and empowerment drive sustainable economic development. Productivity thrives where people feel safe, secure and motivated. Productivity in turn drives diversification and growth - building our existing productive sectors and enabling new ones to emerge, on an inclusive and sustainable growth path for Jamaica.

Sustainable Economic Development

Sustainable economic development requires a sound approach to economic management. It requires continuing along the fiscal responsibility path we established and that has been maintained with bipartisan support. I spoke to this earlier and our Shadow Spokesperson on Finance dealt with this extensively in his budget presentation last week.

Sustainable economic development also requires transitioning Jamaica from a low wage, low tech, low productivity, low growth economy to one which delivers high value-added goods and services to domestic and export markets.

Today I want to share some practical steps that can be taken in that direction and I want to begin with food security.

Agriculture and Rural Development

This Government is not serious about agriculture and food security, and this is reflected in the current estimates of expenditure. Critical areas are being neglected - farm roads expenditure is to be reduced by 17%, extension services (which provide guidance to farmers) is flat, technical service support is being decreased by 37%, and most importantly Research & Development only gets a 2.7% increase (which is way below inflation).

The allocation for irrigation, which supports the National Irrigation Commission (NIC), is flat, while the Essex Valley and Southern Plains irrigation projects are coming to an end having undergone numerous extensions. Examples of areas for growth in agriculture include supporting research and activities like extracting oils and flavours, developing value-added products from our agricultural produce, and capturing the economic potential of waste from harvesting. The quality of our produce is world renowned, and is part of our creative product.

We are also sorely disappointed by the direction the medicinal and therapeutic ganja industry has taken since the PNP decriminalised its use in 2015. Our cannabis sector must be developed in a way that is far more inclusive of small farmers and others who now find themselves marginalised and excluded.

The next PNP Government will be focused on genuinely increasing exports, strengthening the country's food security, and expanding the irrigation and research capabilities in the sector. We are branding this the SMART Programme - Sustainable Management of Agriculture through Research and Technology.

With the limited land space available to us and a growing population that we will need to feed, we must find the right synergy between increasing food production and sustaining our natural resources. Our housing programme will not compromise our most fertile and irrigated lands, as is now the case at Bernard Lodge.

Under the SMART programme we will:

- We will manage the sector through increased training of our youth, and a focus on our agricultural training institutions, 4-H Clubs and the extension services offered through RADA.
- We will increase the productivity of our farmers through the introduction of improved climate-smart farming systems and technology-driven farming operations.
- We will expand and repair our farm roads to enable our farmers to access their farms and transport their produce to market.
- We will engage our major private sector players in poultry, agro-processing, milk and livestock production to create the enabling environment they require to expand their already significant contribution to the sector.
- We will partner with the UWI and other technical institutions to engage in research to boost productivity. The College of Agricultural, Science & Education (CASE) must be given the financial resources to do necessary research that will assist our farmers to produce at a consistently high quality. The next PNP administration intends to upgrade CASE to a university, to enhance the focused institutional

support required in the thrust for greater food security.

- We will boost our own research facilities at Bodles, Orange River and Montpellier to provide the innovations required by our farmers to grow the sector and provide food security for our nation.
- We will make the best planting stock, animal genetics and farming systems in animal husbandry and agronomy available to our farmers.
- We will increase the use of Drones, RFID, Hydroponic farming systems, solar operated irrigation pumps and infield monitoring of soil fertility status to boost our production and increase productivity.
- We will strengthen the laws to protect farmers from agricultural theft, and bring those offences under the Proceeds of Crime Act regime so that the profits can be taken away from criminals who reap what our farmers sew.

Our goal is for agriculture and agro-industries to contribute at least 10-12% of Jamaica's GDP, transforming rural development, providing sustainable employment across the country, and guaranteeing our nation's food security. This is why we are adamant that our concerns regarding the removal of GCT from imported raw foods be immediately reviewed and reconsidered, and the initiatives we proposed earlier be put into action.

I turn now to a number of emerging industries, and our plans for their development:

Emerging Industries

Like our Spokesperson on Finance explained, energy, broadband and internet access are central considerations for advancing inclusive, sustainable economic growth.

Jamaica's fixed broadband population penetration rate of 15% in 2022 ranks Jamaica at the lower end of the internet penetration/adoption spectrum, when compared to other countries in the Caribbean. Our Fixed Broadband subscription is lower than that in the Cayman Islands, Trinidad and Tobago, and Grenada.

We will prioritise investments and initiatives to bridge the digital divide, to ensure that all Jamaican citizens have access to affordable and reliable internet services. This will require investment in building a robust digital infrastructure and expanding access to high-speed internet connectivity, a process which has already started and needs to be accelerated.

By achieving digital connectivity right across the country, Jamaica can create a level playing field for people to access online education, remote work opportunities, and digital services, thereby enabling them to participate fully in the digital economy.

We also intend to expand partnerships with telecommunications companies to deploy broadband networks in underserved areas, providing incentives to encourage adoption of digital technologies among low-income households.

The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (“AI”) as a new frontier of technological advancement is already having a global impact on commerce and life in general, and this is only going to intensify in years to come. Jamaica therefore needs to prepare itself for the positive and negative effects of AI technology, so we can benefit from its massive potential for greater efficiency and competitiveness, and mitigate the serious risks of misrepresentation and fraud that come with it.

The next PNP Administration will develop and introduce AI-related curriculum and digital literacy programmes from primary school to tertiary education. By equipping students with foundational skills in coding, data analysis, and critical thinking, Jamaica will cultivate a new generation of AI-savvy individuals who are well-prepared for the jobs of the future.

We will also introduce adult education and skills training programmes to upskill and re-skill the existing workforce, ensuring that Jamaican citizens are not left behind as automation and AI technologies reshape the labour market.

The issue of internet penetration is also tied to the distribution of digital technology, and impacts the growth of the cluster of emerging industries that we have identified for priority attention - global logistics, the cultural and creative industries, sports, the environmental and ecological heritage, and community tourism. As with agriculture, this government has not demonstrated its seriousness about the development of the cultural and creative industries or sports. The absence of a development plan for culture and the creative industries after eight years, and the barely touched National Sports Policy that we left behind, bear witness to this.

The ‘One Love’ phenomenon now blowing like a natural mystic across the globe shows us what cultural and creative practitioners have been telling us for years. Nurturing and growing the cultural and creative industries, sports and their diverse ecosystems are extremely important for the economic development and cultural identity of Jamaica. This requires the funding and deliberate effort to drive these industries, which are two of the fastest growing areas of economic activity in the world.

In the Government’s budget, \$234 million is allocated to the Jamaican Screen Development Initiative, which we endorse. The government has identified the development of two entertainment spaces, which is a start after so many years of inaction.

We commit that when in government we will prioritise the participatory development of a Master Plan comprising a comprehensive policy and legislative framework to support and incentivize the cultural and creative industries and sports. This plan will address investment and financing, education and training, and infrastructure development for cultural and creative and sports practitioners.

Existing infrastructure for the cultural and creative industries and sports are falling apart island-wide. The Trelawny Sports Centre, Independence Park, Catherine Hall and Sabina Park; The Little Theatre, Ward Theatre, Vale Royal and other existing and potential heritage sites are disintegrating from neglect. How come? CHANGE is sorely needed.

Linkages and Integration

We need to broaden the benefits flowing to our people from our investments in tourism. Instead of spending the entire \$4 billion in advertising ‘sun, sea and sand’, the Government should direct resources to developing and promoting community tourism, cultural industries, sports, eco-tourism and craft.

For example, a round robin series of Reggae, Arts and Cultural Festivals across the island at various dates throughout the year would directly boost community incomes as part of our integrated plan.

This can be done through the municipal corporations, to encourage community development - in other words, community tourism for community development. Such community tourism events would produce revenue for the local authorities, enabling more effective delivery of services at the community level.

This approach promotes greater economic inclusion. It is a glimpse at what ‘holistic’ implementation across these important emerging sectors looks like, to promote sustainable economic development. While the existing enclave tourism model generates wealth for that sector, it is not sufficiently impacting communities in proximity to the enclaves. Though we hear the boasts of record tourism arrivals, we hear very little on why it seems not to elevate communities across Jamaica.

At this juncture, there is one commitment that I wish to make in keeping with our seriousness about culture and the creative industries. When we form the next government, I commit to conferring the Order of National Hero on the Honourable Robert Nesta ‘Bob’ Marley for his service of a most distinguished nature in advancing Jamaican culture and his global impact as a liberating, inspirational force for oppressed peoples across the world. Time Come to recognize that the Gong is truly a National Hero, and confer that honour on him accordingly!

I turn now to measures to make real our commitment to the development of Infrastructure and Human amenities.

Infrastructure and Human Amenities

Energy and climate change

I turn now to the vexed issue of energy costs in Jamaica, which are way too high and are another structural impediment to our economic transformation that must be addressed.

These are some of our proposals to ensure a viable and sustainable electricity system and bring down electricity costs to consumers and businesses:

- We will undertake a massive regularisation support drive for electricity connections, including a subsidy to help families meet the costs of rewiring, inspection and certification, and these families

with solar panels to help them to manage their energy costs and build climate sustainability. solar panels to help them to manage their energy costs and build climate sustainability.

- We will roll out a national Energy Efficiency, Natural Lighting & Passive Cooling programme, financed by local, regional and international development banks and private risk capital. The objective is to achieve an average 50% reduction in residential energy consumption and cost, with a two-year payback.
- We will prioritise achieving our renewable energy target of 33% by 2030. This Government has failed to issue regular renewable energy RFPs (indeed, only one has been issued in the past 8 years), which is an indictment on their management of the economy. These RFPs generate fee income for the Government, and the capital required to implement these wind, solar, hydro and waste to energy (WTE) projects is privately funded. We intend to issue utility-scale RFPs every 2 to 3 years, to achieve our renewable energy target.
- We will review the tax system affecting the energy sector to ensure that it incentivizes the investments in efficiency and cost-reducing replacement and expansion of the sector, in keeping with our policy priorities to reduce Jamaica's carbon footprint.

Making real change for our people requires much greater attention to water, roads and works - the Local Government Election made this clear.

Water, Roads and Works

All governance is prioritisation, especially when resources are limited. What Governments prioritise determines the kind of society we are building. It tells us what the future will look like.

We believe that over the next decade, public capital expenditure must prioritise investments to improve the production, distribution and harvesting of water, and rehabilitating the minor road and farm road networks across Jamaica. These are the predominant demands of the people, and Government must answer to the people.

The National Water Commission (NWC) purports to supply 73% of the population with water, meaning that over 25% of our population is not served by the public water supply system. Private water companies do not close the gap in communities where the NWC is not providing water.

There needs to be a major thrust to build connectivity among the network of pumping stations and other elements that make up Jamaica's water supply system, so that water can be efficiently distributed from where it is abundant to where there is a lack of supply, and to achieve a high level of cohesion among the various state agencies that have responsibility for different aspects of the system.

It is unacceptable that only slightly over \$1 billion is slated for water supply projects this year, given the water shortage issues we have been facing over the last several years and the constant cries of the people

for water. Meanwhile, the NWC is making announcements of a plan to develop 577 acres in Norbrook, in a watershed area at that.

We welcome the public-private partnership to supply 15 million gallons a day from St. Catherine to serve the Kingston Metropolitan Area, Portmore and Spanish Town, as long as the commercial terms are fairly balanced to protect the public. This project is slated to begin in 2025/26 (i.e. not until next year), according to the Public Investment Programme. One is left to wonder why it will take 3 years since the agreement was signed to start the work on such an urgent project.

But what of piped water to the rest of Jamaica? What of plans to secure our natural water resources across Jamaica, especially in an era of intensifying climate change?

The last three decades have witnessed significant development of highways. In the meantime, the interior roads and community roads on which most of our people have to drive on a daily basis are in an appalling condition. Project SPARK is an effort to start addressing this problem, but we have serious doubts as to the approach being taken, given our negative experience with the constituency allocation for roads in 2022 which many MPs have reported has still not yet come through.

The last PNP Administration established the JEEP secretariat, with the necessary technical personnel to efficiently drive the infrastructure projects executed under that Programme and ensure proper accountability for the expenditure. We commend that model to the Government so that Project Spark doesn't burn out without achieving a significant improvement to the minor road network.

Health and Wellness

There are several green papers, audits and reviews within the Ministry of Health & Wellness that clearly outline the dilapidated state of the public health system. Even without resorting to these sources, there is the travel advisory issued by the US State Department, advising of the poor state of our hospitals and the prohibitive costs associated with accessing private healthcare.

This is borne out by the constant cries of the users of the public health system, and the frustration of the healthcare providers often manifested in industrial unrest and protests.

One therefore has to wonder what guides the priorities for expenditure of the annual budget of the MOHW. With a capital budget of \$11 billion, nearly twice that of the Ministry of Education, one would expect clear efforts to decrease inefficiencies, to improve the overall experience of accessing the public health system, and to address the major health threats affecting Jamaicans. However, these major threats of chronic non communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and cancer have been sidelined in favour of massive spends on infrastructure concentrated in three hospitals.

The massive cost overrun in the Cornwall Regional Hospital will go down as the greatest project cost variation in the history of Jamaica, at a staggering 1100%. Never before has any Jamaican seen a project move from an estimated cost to completion of less than 2 billion dollars and end up costing more than ten times that amount at over 20 billion dollars. And this figure is expected to rise as the completion date is pushed further away. It is telling that no-one has been held accountable for this debacle.

With the Minister of Health bemoaning the lack of local expertise in hospital construction, he has nevertheless decided to begin the construction of two new hospital facilities at the UHWI and Spanish Town Hospital campuses.

What is the logic behind that, when the English-speaking Caribbean's largest community, Portmore, still does not have a public hospital? And when the western region is still struggling without a fully operational Cornwall Regional Hospital? And when the majority of parishes are without a facility that has basic diagnostic equipment, and in major urban areas there is an economically unsound reliance on utilising private facilities for public patients, transported in scarcely available ambulances.

With this budget, users of the public health care system will continue to suffer from prolonged waiting times, overcrowded emergency rooms, inadequate hospital beds and overworked, and demotivated staff who can't wait for the next recruiter for a way out.

The rehabilitation of clinics affords ribbon-cutting opportunities, but they remain chronically understaffed, forcing patients to have long dates between appointments when doctors will be available.

There is no plan to improve the screening and surveillance of the top cancers in Jamaica, with only one working mammogram in the entire public sector and a waiting list of over one year for a colonoscopy to determine if your symptoms are due to colon cancer.

There is no plan to address the fact that half of patients with hypertension and diabetes do not know that they are suffering from these silent killers, because there is no screening programme.

The inefficiencies in the Regional Health Authorities continue to impact the growing administrative costs, with several overlapping administrative divisions and roles that could be streamlined for significant cost savings.

Like the census, immunisation rates are well below targets, and the maternal mortality rate at its highest levels in over fifty years. Yet no significant changes in budgetary support to address these serious problems. The Ministry is outsourcing diagnostics to the tune of 1.4 billion dollars, instead of using the resources to outfit selected hospitals with equipment owned and operated by the Ministry, to earn significant cost savings. As with so many things in this Ministry, once has to ask – who benefits?

The estimates of expenditure for the MOHW do not appear to be guided by the needs of the users of the public health system, but by a fixation on mega projects fraught with the proven risk of uncontrolled cost overruns. This is the direction taken by this Government, while our health indices continue to deteriorate and

our people suffer for lack of basic services in the majority of facilities that will see no improvements from this budget.

Land, Housing and sustainable living

Shelter and Land remain important national priorities. On the minds of hardworking Jamaicans is the question - will they ever be able to enjoy the security of being able to own a piece of land or a house?

Using data from the 2022 “Voluntary National Review Report of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs”, we know that in 2019 over 100,000 fewer Jamaicans rented or lived in their own home than in 2007. 30% of households were either living rent free with owner’s consent, what Jamaicans would call cotching, or they were occupying premises without the legal owner’s consent. That represented an increase of over 10 percentage points over the preceding decade. If you live in a major urban centre, you are most concerned about the fact that the price of housing built under the JLP is out of reach for most people.

Shelter is one of the basic needs of Jamaicans. In the Jamaican historical and socio-economic context it requires a proactive policy by the State to provide affordable housing for our people.

The PNP understands this. It is what motivated us to develop Portmore, Harbour View, Mona Heights, Frontier Heights and a plethora of other housing developments across the island.

It is why in 1976 the Most Hon. Michael Manley established the National Housing Trust (NHT) to provide affordable housing for Jamaicans.

It is why the Most Hon. P.J. Patterson in the 1990s established Operation Pride to provide land and housing for our citizens, which despite its challenges delivered over 50,000 titles lots for the people in Pines of Karachi, Mount Edgecombe, Melrose Mews, Bedward Gardens, Bellaire and a host of other communities. Similarly, the Most Hon. Portia Simpson Miller embarked on an initiative to remove barracks housing and provide houses for sugar workers to live in dignity.

In stark contrast, this Government has built a mere 200 social houses ‘one-one’ since 2016, a paltry average of 25 per year. It presided over the demolition of poor people’s houses in Clifton in St. Catherine, and sought to evict 65 settled families from their homes in Lluidas Vale.

In truth and in fact, the cost of housing is now out of the reach of the ordinary Jamaican, with a two-bedroom unit costing over \$20 million, while the NHT only provides up to \$9 million to a contributor to purchase a home.

The NHT has been financially weakened by the Government's continued extraction of \$11.4 billion every year to finance the Government's annual budgets since 2016, after the 2013-16 IMF programme ended. The recent decision to require NHT contributors earning over \$31,000 per week to borrow from private financial institutions, flows from that. Whereas contributors to NHT have been charged interest at 5% by the NHT, private financial institutions are charging around 9% and the NHT is having to subsidise the difference by payments to the private financial institutions, further weakening the institution.

Jamaica needs change, and we are on a road to change. We recognize that the police, soldiers, teachers, nurses, civil servants and young professionals need access to affordable housing, so that must be the road to change. These are some of our proposals on the road to change:
to change.

- We will repurpose the NHT to ensure that it focuses on the building of affordable housing.
- We will end the annual extraction of J\$11.4 billion from the NHT to support the Government's budget and put this money into building affordable houses for our people.
- We will provide targeted, well-designed incentives for developers to get into the construction of affordable houses, so that more of our population can acquire a home using their NHT benefits.
- We will complete the unfinished Operation Pride schemes so that the residents enjoy the full benefits of what was started for them.
- We will launch a new programme based on a similar concept, with a robust and transparent accountability structure, to tackle the deep problem of informal settlements across Jamaica and bring dignified housing in organised communities to our citizens.

Good Governance:

The second pillar on our road to CHANGE is good governance. When it comes to governance, one thing is certain, things cannot be allowed to remain the way they are now.

This is why I have identified an entire cluster of portfolios, within our own governance structure to address the now desperate area of Transparency and Accountable Governance. This is where the CHANGE is truly required.

- CHANGE means replacing contractual victimisation and cronyism and with competitiveness and participation.
- CHANGE means no to government badness, and
- CHANGE means no more 'chuck it pon dem' policy.

This all has to end. It must stop. It is untenable. It requires clean hands and a clean heart. To deliver the change we want to see, we have to live the change we want to be. Over here, we don't just speak of 'holistic' processes, we create the structures to deliver them. We don't do arbitrary, we identify sustainable methods



TRANSPARENT & ACCOUNTABLE GOVERNANCE



Social Justice

A robust social justice agenda is necessary for achieving high levels of inclusive, sustainable economic growth if Jamaica is to become a socially cohesive society that moves away from the negative behaviours and attitudes that undermine our mission to achieve national greatness.

Deepening social justice is an important part of this objective. Some of our proposals include:

- We will implement a progressive beach access policy, to ensure that the public has reasonable access to Jamaica's beaches, as is done in other Caribbean islands which also enjoy a strong tourism industry. Beach access is important for our people's recreation and leisure. This is no small thing, given the levels of violence and stress in our society.
We will work with all stakeholders, including communities which have historically used beaches for recreation and fishing and also tourism interests, to secure appropriate rights of access for the public to be able to enjoy our beaches. If necessary, we will use legislation to protect the public's interest in having reasonable beach access while protecting the legitimate interests of business owners.
- While we endorse the raise of the threshold for the income tax on pensions, the truth is that our pensioners are really struggling and much more is needed to be done for them. Administrative changes to facilitate the speedy commencement of pension payments to retired employees is impatient of debate. And we have other creative proposals for expanding pension benefits to relieve the suffering of our pensioners, which I will share on another occasion.
- We will complete the long-outstanding review of the Domestic Violence Act, move quickly to implement the recommendations arising from that review, and establish support centres in every parish to provide safe havens for the survivors of domestic violence and other gender-based violence.
- We will enact legislation to empower the Public Defender to bring legal proceedings to defend the rights of vulnerable Jamaicans, and expand the scope of the Office of the Public Defender to become a National Human Rights Institution that will monitor and report on Jamaica's performance in respecting the rights of our citizens.
- We will complete the long-outstanding process of enacting legislation to enable Jamaica to accede to the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, a missing element in the current accountability framework.
- We will expand the legal aid system, in partnership with the legal profession, to include constitutional and civil matters, so that people can get help to access their rights in important areas of their lives, including in property matters, estate matters, personal injury cases and employment cases.
- We will create a supportive and nurturing ecosystem for start-ups and MSMEs, so that formalising their businesses is attractive, welcoming and easy. We will offer a similar package of benefits and incentives to new and existing MSMEs as is available under the Act governing Special Economic Zones.
- We will enact legislation to require banks to provide a minimum suite of basic financial services to customers without charging fees, which may be considered part of the annual cost of their banking licences, and we will enforce minimum service standards to ensure that customers have ready access to ATMs to withdraw and deposit money, especially in under-served areas where banks have been closing branches.

- We will use the legislation governing ganja to create a special ecosystem for the Rastafari community economic empowerment of the Rastafari community, a matter close to my heart as the architect of the PNP Government's 2015 decriminalisation of ganja.

Making change through Social Justice leads to a serious reconsideration of Jamaica's current place and standing in the world.

Foreign and Regional Affairs

Our international policy position centres on the principle of being good neighbours to all while maintaining our sovereignty and independence. That guides our relationships with the global family of nations.

We steadfastly maintain the right to exercise independent judgement and make independent decisions based on the principles that we embrace. We will continue to work towards strengthening our relationships within the Global South even as we maintain long-standing relationships with our traditional partners.

Our trade with the African continent and its large and rapidly expanding economies is modest. The top five economies are South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, Algeria, and Ethiopia, and we also have strong historical connections with fast-growing countries Ghana and Sierra Leone. There are therefore tremendous opportunities for us to build out new trade and investment linkages with Africa. Jamaica needs to stop dithering and ratify the historic US\$1.5 Billion agreement between CARICOM and the African Exim Bank. As committed regionalists, the dire situation in our close neighbour Haiti is of great concern to us.

We commit ourselves fully to engagement in the regional efforts associated with that crisis, and to reasserting Jamaica's constructive leadership role within CARICOM that has been allowed to atrophy over the past eight years.

A progressive, principled foreign policy delivers real, positive CHANGE for our people. The PetroCaribe oil-financing arrangement and the San Jose Accord are striking examples of what a progressive, principled foreign policy has done for our people in the past. That is what we are committed to globally and locally.

Good Government in National Life

CHANGE at a national level must focus on good governance.

In this modern era of pervasive information-sharing and communication, good governance is increasingly essential to maintain the people's trust and confidence in our democracy. Citizens are demanding that their leaders uphold the highest standards of accountability, transparency and trustworthiness.

All the measures we have outlined for implementation will only be possible if we change the approach to governance that now exists. I leave you with the ways, means, quality and spirit of the change in governance that we commit to.

Good governance isn't merely a set of ideals; it is the foundation upon which an equitable and just society is built. The People's National Party has always been committed to fulfilling these ideals, and we will translate these principles into tangible actions that uplift and empower every member of our society

We are in an increasingly low-trust environment:

- Since this JLP Government came to office in 2016, no less than eight (8) Ministers have been forced to resign or have otherwise been sanctioned for a range of serious breaches, and Jamaica continues to rank poorly on international corruption indices.
- The move in 2020 to take away the chairmanship of most parliamentary committees from the Opposition has weakened that mechanism of holding the Government to account.
- The manoeuvres to delay the tabling of reports from the Auditor-General and the Integrity Commission remains a contentious matter, especially since the legal opinion on which this delay is purportedly based has been withheld from parliamentarians and the wider public.
- When the former Speaker was forced to resign as a result of an Integrity Commission investigation, the move to replace her with the wife of the Prime Minister, so that the head of Parliament is now the spouse of the head of Government, does not sit well with the tradition that the Speaker must act independently of the government of the day.
- The failure to disclose the identity of the so-called "illicit six" MPs who are under investigation by the Integrity Commission for illicit enrichment remains a festering sore, only made worse by the Prime Minister's gag order on Cabinet Ministers speaking publicly on these matters.
- The Prime Minister's statutory declarations of assets, liabilities and income have not been certified and published by the Integrity Commission, for successive years. It is untenable for the Head of Government of Jamaica not to be in good standing with the country's Integrity Commission. All I can say is that if I were in your position, I would take away myself and hand over to someone else who isn't compromised.
- Jamaica's iconic global track superstar, the Hon. Usain Bolt, and many other innocent investors were carried down in the scandalous SSL fiasco, and we can't hear anything about charges being brought against the responsible culprits. The Kroll forensic audit report, which has cost taxpayers many millions

and was delivered to the Government months ago, must be released to the public. Jamaica will not accept a cover up of this shameful debacle which has tainted our country's reputation as a safe and well-regulated place for Jamaicans and home and abroad to save and invest. In fact, a commission of enquiry into this SSL scandal will be needed.

Jamaica is crying out for change in this area. This is why I have identified an entire cluster of portfolios within our own governance structure to address the now desperate area of Transparent and Accountable Governance. We must translate good governance principles into tangible action that restores trust and confidence in our leaders and preserves our cherished freedoms and democratic way of life.

CHANGE means no more hiding the truth from Jamaicans. No more deception in official public communication. CHANGE means putting transparency and communication at the heart of good governance. It affirms that respect is due to those who elect governments and pay taxes. That's why we will implement a comprehensive strategy centred around engagement and accessibility. Our aim is to ensure that every voice is heard, and to bridge the gap between leadership and the people.

This means holding town hall meetings, physical and virtual, to give every citizen a voice in the decision-making process. It means conducting community walks, listening to the concerns of our constituents, and working together to find solutions. And it means providing regular progress reports on projects and programmes, keeping the public informed and involved every step of the way.

CHANGE means practising accountability as a central principle of good governance. That is why, after the terrible incident of the woman being beaten in public by a stool, I tabled an Impeachment Bill in this House in 2021, to provide a mechanism to hold to account any parliamentarian whose egregious conduct brings his or her office into disrepute. Despite this having been a manifesto promise of the current Government in the 2016 general election, the Impeachment Bill has not been allowed to go forward to a joint select committee for wide stakeholder consultation, to be then followed by its passage into law.

When I entered the political arena, there were some entrenched ways of doing things. Making CHANGE requires a fresh approach. Things will be very different under my watch. I will tolerate none of it.

The last PNP Administration put local government in the Constitution and passed the three strategic laws to modernise the legal framework of local government in keeping with modern best practices. One of those laws, the Local Governance Act, makes provision (in section 18) for the recall of elected Mayors, which may be initiated by a petition alleging a charge of gross misconduct or dereliction of duty that is signed by at least 25% of the registered voters in the city municipality.

The next PNP government will institute a fair and balanced recall system for elected councillors and parliamentarians, to deepen accountability and empower voters with recourse where they are badly let down by the person who they elected to parliament.

CONCLUSION

Jamaica has spoken, and the PNP has listened to the concerns of the people. We are offering solutions based on thorough research and consultation with all stakeholders.

We will embark on this journey together with the people, towards a future where opportunity for advancement is not a privilege but a right for all. We commit to good governance for the people of Jamaica, not as an abstract concept, but as a living promise fulfilled to every citizen of our Nation.

We are on a fast track on the 'Road to CHANGE'... and we invite all Jamaicans along this exciting journey in a spirit of hope for a better and brighter future for all our people.

Thank You, Madame Speaker.

QUALITY



LEADER OF THE
OPPOSITION

MARCH 19
2024

MARK J.
GOLDING