



LEADER OF THE
OPPOSITION

MARCH 18
2025

CHAMPIONING CHANGE

**GROWTH, OPPORTUNITY
& PROGRESS FOR ALL.**

**BUDGET | 20
PRESENTATION | 25**

MARK J. GOLDING, MP
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

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MARK J. GOLDING
CONTRIBUTION TO THE 2025/2026 BUDGET DEBATE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MARCH 18, 2025
CHAMPIONING CHANGE

Growth, Opportunity & Progress for All

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INTRODUCTION

I am very grateful to the Almighty God to be back here today to make my fifth contribution to this budget debate as Leader of the Opposition. I fully expect it to be my final budget debate contribution on this side of the aisle in this Honourable House.

I return to this House this year with a resolve and determination to show up, stand up, to speak up and to act on behalf of the people of Jamaica. I come with an unwavering commitment to making the right decisions to advance the inclusive growth of our economy and the sustainable development of our people.

Almighty God has remained my refuge and strength. In the book of Micah it is said – *“And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God”*. This passage in chapter 6 verse 8 has been a beacon and guide in my leadership of the Opposition going into our year of CHANGE.

Without the people of the great constituency of St. Andrew South, I would not be here. I extend my deepest gratitude to them for their dedication, courage and affection, and for their understanding of the exigencies of the role of Leader of the Opposition. 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. A special mention must be made of our two amazing councillors, Sarah Marshall and Louise Newland, who I work with closely as a powerful team, and who always have my back and make sure the work gets done. With us, the word is always LOVE. You are truly my extended family.

I have taken this journey of representation with a strong partner at my side. My wife Sandra stands with me, and her support is my rock. Our children and grandchildren bring us great joy, and strengthen my commitment to the future of this country.

As I undertake this awesome responsibility of leading the Opposition; of standing up for, and standing with, the Jamaican people, I do so with a group of Members of Parliament and Senators who I hail today. There shall soon be many more among us, and we will be looking across at the chairs that we now occupy. We shall be seized with the responsibility of implementing the plans and policies that we have spent these years refining. We will champion Jamaica's much-needed change!

To our new Clerk of the Houses and her staff here in Gordon House, I thank you for your service to Jamaica and your support of our efforts here.

To all my comrades in the People's National Party, its leadership at the various levels, our courageous and committed workers and members – we are marching on to progress. The historic day draws nigh. To the team of patriots in the Office of the Leader of the Opposition who make my work possible, I am grateful for your support.

The members of my Shadow Cabinet and their deputies, our junior spokespersons and our Policy Commission, whose hours of dedicated voluntary service as champions of change have helped to produce the work I will share with you today. Thank you for being Champions of Change. Yours is the kind of effort this country deserves. You rolled up your sleeves and simply got to work without fanfare to craft plans to save the nation from stagnation and disappointment. As our leader I am proud of the work you have done.

We are now ready. The People's National Party is ready to deliver quality representation, efficient management of government, and good governance to the people of Jamaica. We are ready to be Jamaica's Champions of Change.

ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

Over the past thirteen years, Jamaica has put its public finances on a sound footing. The amount of our national debt relative to the size of our economy has been cut in half. With the debt now at 69% of GDP, we are getting close to the 60% of GDP target fixed in our law as a fiscal rule.

This is a great national achievement, the result of continuity of fiscal policy across successive political administrations. How has this benefitted our people? It has meant that money that used to be spent on interest payments can now be spent on other things. It has provided choices as to how to allocate the national budget; choices that were not available before.

Nevertheless, the outcome of all the sacrifices made to achieve this triumph in debt reduction has been deeply disappointing. Our national wealth is stagnant, as our economy is hardly growing. In fact, our economy experienced negative growth for 2024, and was in a technical recession for the last two quarters ending in December.

Indeed, the credit rating Fitch in its recent assessment of Jamaica made the telling point that, and I quote, *“Jamaica’s credit ratings remain constrained by deep structural weaknesses, including subdued growth potential owing to a high crime rate, low productivity and weak*

demographics, and vulnerability to external shocks including weather-related.”

Macro-economic indicators do not always tell the full story. Jamaica has statistically low overall unemployment numbers, at 3.5%. However, Jamaica still suffers from chronic underemployment, low wages and unstable incomes. According to the World Bank, 50% of non-agricultural jobs are informal with no benefits or security.

So despite being employed, many Jamaicans are still struggling and are essentially “working poor”. They are unable to withstand sickness or other unexpected events. Too many of our people are in a vulnerable position, despite being employed. Many Jamaicans are unable to set aside any savings for the future, even though they have a job.

Miss Pearl does some selling from a stall Downtown. The official statistics consider her to be employed, but her earnings are modest and she finds it hard to make ends meet.

Due to the unstable nature of much of the employment from which the statistics are derived, many workers are effectively locked out of the housing market. Lending institutions are unwilling to extend mortgages to individuals whose employment situation is precarious.

As pointed out last Thursday by our Spokesperson for Finance, this is reflected in the UN's Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) report. 55% (i.e. more than half) of Jamaicans, more than half our population, are facing moderate to severe food insecurity. Our people cannot afford to buy enough nutritious food to live a healthy life. People in Jamaica are skipping meals, forced to buy cheaper, less nutritious food.

This state of food insecurity is reflected in adverse health outcomes. We have an epidemic of diabetes (what people call "sugar"), hypertension (what people call "pressure") and far too many people getting strokes. Some depend on 'Cash Pot' winnings to determine whether they can provide a meal for their families that day.

If employment is increasing but your economy is not growing, it means that productivity is falling. If employment is increasing but national wealth is stagnant, it means that the jobs being created are low paying jobs that cannot sustain a decent quality of life.

You cannot use statistics to tell a struggling man that they are not struggling. You cannot use statistics to tell a hungry child that they are not hungry, or an underpaid worker that they are doing well in life. People know the reality of their lives. They know the official statistics "cyaa nyam".

Jamaica has the second highest rate of brain drain *in the world*. The aspiration of most of our people is to migrate to other countries where there are better opportunities to step up in life. We struggle to keep our university graduates and other trained professionals.

Another area where the data confirms what we have been saying is in our Trade deficit. We are not producing enough either for our own use or to sell abroad.

Trade Deficit

Jamaica has a massive chronic trade deficit, with imports of US\$6.1 billion but exports of US\$1.5 billion in the first 10 months of 2024. This gap is mainly financed by remittances – money sent home by our family members in the Diaspora who support their loved ones here at home.

Now, even that is threatened with all the global uncertainties. Jamaica cannot plan its future based on such a deep reliance on remittances, which we do not control. We need to execute a strategy to reduce this vulnerability.

Our main imports are oil and gas (US\$3.8 billion in 2023), which remain our main sources of fuel for electricity and transportation. Food to feed our people and our tourist visitors (US\$1.6 billion in 2023) is also on that list.

We must replace imported fuels, as much as possible, by renewable energy sources like solar that we are blessed with in abundance. Similarly, we must produce food here to rely less on imports from abroad.

We need to grow the Jamaican economy so that everyone has the opportunity to earn a good life right here where we live.

Fiscal Management

After the Minister of Finance's presentation, the country needs to be reminded that it was the last PNP administration which, in 2014, passed the Financial Administration and Audit (Amendment) Act. It sets the target that now establishes the target of 60% of debt-to GDP, the date for meeting that target, and the rules and the formula the government now uses to determine how much fiscal space they have.

I chaired the legislation committee of Cabinet which finalized the details of that Act, working with others including the present Fiscal Commissioner. It is that transformational legislative achievement that has guided the fiscal policy decisions that have resulted in Jamaica's remarkable performance in debt reduction over the past 12 years.

Even former Finance minister Nigel Clarke had to acknowledge the PNP's role in steadying the ship in his 2020 budget presentation. Let's see for

ourselves. (VIDEO of Nigel Clarke 2020 budget). [NC: “*Moving forward in a direction of National Unity, I want to take a moment to recognise the work done by the prior Administration, in particular Former Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller and Former Finance Minister Dr Peter Phillips in doggedly pursuing the EFF, and rallying Jamaicans around it.*”]

The historical record is clear. The crucial reforms and economic management that have created the long-term stability in Jamaica’s finances began the last PNP administration under Portia Simpson-Miller and Dr Peter Phillips. They understood the assignment, and they championed change!

We acknowledge that the current government continued what we had started. Jamaica has benefitted from continuity in this journey. But let no-one forget - We did the heavy lifting to take Jamaica out of a deep debt crisis, and set Jamaica on a sustainable fiscal path. This was after the JLP government of 2007/2011 *couldn’t cross it and run lef’ it*. It was not in their DNA. Right, Julian?

On Thursday, our Spokesperson for Finance irrefutably established that Jamaica’s tremendous achievement in public debt reduction is a PNP baby. We are proud of that achievement and that legacy, and we remain fully

committed to fiscal discipline. We will not do anything that would jeopardize the sacrifices that have been made to get Jamaica where we are.

Emptying the cupboard

The JLP government loves to refer to 'running with it'. Why was the comment made? The then Finance Minister was referring to the continuation of the construction of the East/West Highway from Mandela to May Pen, which the JLP had opposed. So opposed to it were they that they disciplined the Mayor of Spanish Town, Dr Raymoth Notice, for attending the opening of that leg of the highway. But now they have extended the same highway to Williamsfield. And that same highway is now being sold on the market to raise money for this coming fiscal year's budget. Oh what a tangled web they weave, when they practice to deceive!

But what about the current situation? The budget for the current 2024/25 fiscal year was funded by over \$70 billion of non-tax revenue from the sale of 12 years of future income.

That meant taking what was to be earned over 12 years of Jamaica's future revenues from the Norman Manley International Airport, and selling it off to spend now.

How was the money used? To finance various current expenses - a one-time so-called reverse income tax credit, one year of other tax relief that is going to be an ongoing annual cost to the budget, and some other expenditures. None of these will have a lasting beneficial impact on the future of this country.

Recurrent expenditures ought properly to be funded from revenues generated in the year in which those expenditures are incurred. Not by selling off future income and leaving the cupboard empty for years to come. Not one school, one hospital or one water reservoir, or any other lasting national asset, has been built with those funds. Nothing that will deliver solid benefits to the country throughout those twelve years.

And when you add that to the \$9 billion expected from the sale of the government's remaining shares in Transjamaican Highway, it looks, sounds and smells like "running with it" to me.

And there is more of this planned for the coming fiscal year. The Revenue Estimates for 2025/26 have \$139.8 billion of non-tax revenues, including Financial Distributions of \$66.2 billion. I enquired of the Ministry of Finance as to the composition of the Ministry of Finance as to the composition of the \$66.2 billion of Financial Distributions. I was told that "the major sources

are the National Housing Trust and the monetization of contractual cash flows”.

Well, we know that the government is still taking \$11.4 billion out of the NHT each year. And this is despite the current Prime Minister (then Opposition Leader) committing in 2013 to amend the law and ring fence the funds for its primary purpose. Do you recall that, Prime Minister? Let me remind you of your words (VIDEO - Safeguarding NHT Funds - A Prime Minister's Commitment). [In that 2013 All Angles interview Dionne Jackson Miller asks you "*Is it your belief, in principle, that the funds from the National Housing Trust (NHT) should be ring-fenced exclusively for the benefit of NHT contributors?*" Prime Minister, you answered saying "*It should be ring-fenced to use for the objects and purposes of the legislation.*"]

If \$11.4 billion of \$66.2 billion is being taken from the NHT, then the other \$54.8 billion is from the so-called “monetization of contractual cash flows”. I enquired further of the Ministry of Finance, and it has been confirmed that another large sale of future income is to take place in the coming year. However, despite my asking, no further details have been provided.

Clearly, this will be another “run with it” transaction, selling off future revenues to fund expenditures in this year’s budget. In other words, further emptying

the cupboard in the coming years with nothing lasting to show for it. That is not sound fiscal management. That is playing fast and loose with the future of the country.

Going For Growth

Jamaica's economy needs to grow stronger and faster. When you came to office ten years ago you quickly pronounced 5 in 4. You set up a Ministry precisely named for that. You even named economic ambassadors.

This has been a colossal failure. Jamaica's annual growth rate from 2016 through 2019 was sluggish, approximating 1%. We had the Covid hit, and a short-lived post-Covid recovery bounce, but a downward growth trajectory since the beginning of 2022. There was negative growth for the entire year of 2024. Jamaica ended 2024 in a technical recession, with two consecutive quarters of negative growth.

The government blames the negative growth in 2024 on Hurricane Beryl, which caused damage of approximately 2% of GDP, and some subsequent heavy rainfall. But that really can't spin, because several of our Caribbean neighbours that, in relative terms, were hit even harder by Beryl, have been able to achieve economic growth of over 4% in 2024.

The unacceptable situation is that Jamaica has lower growth rates than any other country in the Caribbean except Haiti, which has a unique set of challenges.

So, after nine years of this government, we have an economy stagnating like molasses; negative growth last year; a technical recession; high cost of living; low standard of living, more people in low paying jobs; brain drain like a runaway train; a chronic trade deficit; and spending of future revenue that will leave the cupboard empty.

The undeniable facts are that this government has mismanaged the economy and has failed to build strong growth from the fiscal gains that we engineered. We cannot continue this way. Things have to change.

CHAMPIONING CHANGE

When we speak about change relating to the national development of a country, we know that it is a process. Change requires a vision. I stand on the shoulders of the leaders who led the Party I now lead. They were champions of change, steering this nation to Independence and through the choppy waters of national development. Social justice, equality and opportunity guided their decisions and processes, as it will mine.

United with fresh ideas and solid plans, we are ready to assume the mantle of government to deliver growth, opportunity and progress for all.

Our strategic objective

In an inspiring presentation last Thursday that has ignited a flame of hope in many Jamaicans, our Spokesperson for Finance outlined some of our plans. As he aptly put it, we will *“combine fiscal responsibility with innovative, bold leadership to break free from the cycle of low growth that has limited Jamaica's potential.”*

As he also said, we will – *“relentlessly pursue deliberate, inclusive, and sustainable growth that reaches every corner of Jamaica. Growth that transforms our economy by moving beyond low-wage jobs to high-value industries, fostering innovation, and driving value-added exports. This means creating better-paying jobs, improving infrastructure, and empowering local businesses to compete on the global stage. Our focus is on growth that improves lives, lifts families out of poverty, and creates opportunities for all Jamaicans. This is how we will build a resilient economy—one that benefits the many, not the few, and addresses the urgent challenges of today while preparing for the opportunities of tomorrow.”*

This constitutes the broad strategic objective to be pursued by the next PNP administration, as this is what securing the future of Jamaica demands at this stage of our national development.

We took this country from the brink of economic disaster in 2012 and set it on a firm path to sustained recovery. We will do it again with the growth and development agenda that it needs. This is the only way that we can lift our people out of the cycle of poverty and underdevelopment.

Focus on Growth - Four E's supported by Ethics

He spoke to our Four-E's Strategy - Efficiency, Education, Energy and Emerging Industries - to drive inclusive and sustainable growth.

As Leader of an Opposition that is preparing to assume government, it falls to me to set the tone of our upcoming leadership. There is a spiritual and ethical dimension to this, a fifth 'E' on which our growth agenda is founded, and that is 'Ethics'. The change Jamaica is calling for cannot occur without it.

Ethics: An Ethical Society for National Development

In this budget debate, and as Jamaica moves towards the general elections, many proposals and promises will be made addressing matters

of national importance: growth, governance, education, crime, employment, social issues, etc.

The achievement of our goals depends on human effort and cooperation, built on our relationship with Almighty God. This is the source of our capacity to overcome our many challenges.

A critical dimension which concerns many people a great deal, and which I feel compelled to address, is what may be referred to as "*the moral decay of the social fabric*" of our country. It is manifested in the lack of respect and care in how we treat each other; the callousness of behaviour we see around us every day; and the corruption that has taken over the affairs of the nation. Indeed, it has everything to do with the values which uphold our society, and our attitudes to life and to each other in our society.

Former Prime Minister P J Patterson tried with a Values and Attitudes programme, but unfortunately it was sacrificed on the altar of partisan politics (indeed, I believe former Prime Minister Bruce Golding has acknowledged his regret about that). Time come now for a national effort, for a non-political movement that embraces principles and practices for the spiritual, moral and ethical upliftment of Jamaica.

The next PNP Government is committed to such a process. We do not propose that it be led by us as politicians, as experience teaches that with that approach it would likely not get off the ground. But it will be supported, facilitated and championed by the next PNP government.

Our vision is that this movement will be led by spiritual and civic leaders who have the reputation, credibility, commitment and desire to do so. Collectively, we must raise the bar as champions of change, and restore the social fabric of the country. If we can do that, it will make it so much easier to overcome our challenges and achieve our economic and social goals.

Efficiency: Tackling Inefficiency in Government

Businesses in Jamaica continue to struggle due to structural barriers that limit their ability to grow, innovate, and compete in a global trading environment.

Jamaica's bureaucracy continues to labour under procedures and rules that are no longer fit for purpose. This creates delays, frustration and additional costs to doing business in Jamaica. The bureaucracy must be reformed to help our economy move forward efficiently, rather than being a drag on

productivity and competitiveness. This is a critical area that needs priority attention. This government has dropped the ball.

As Prime Minister I will establish and personally chair a Task Force, using my skills and experience as a legislator and in government to tackle the inefficiencies head-on. We will remove or amend the laws and rules that slow down productivity and stand in the way of growth and development. We will get rid of outdated regulations, and drive the required changes to make the bureaucracy user-friendly and efficient for citizens and for business.

Education & Training

The education system, our second 'E', is the centre of our strategy, as I have consistently said every year. The system is failing to provide consistent standards of performance across schools. While there are several institutions of excellence, over 30% of children entering secondary school from primary school are unable to read and write or do basic arithmetic. This flows through into secondary school performance, where less than 20% of students leave with the minimum acceptable outcome of five subjects including English and Maths.

The next PNP government will prioritize raising standards at the early childhood and primary levels, by addressing the needs of children from birth onwards. This will mean making investments with the goal that all our children entering secondary school are able to read, write, do basic arithmetic and think critically.

These investments are required in teacher training and compensation, infrastructure and technology, and in support services for parenting

Absenteeism is a big problem. Too many children are missing days of school each week. We will expand and improve the school feeding programme to ensure adequate and proper nutrition, and encourage school attendance.

That is why last Thursday the Shadow Spokesperson for Finance outlined our E.A.S.E. programme (Ensuring Adequate Sustenance for Education). We commit to providing a daily lunch meal at primary and secondary school for all children who need it. We commit to extending this daily breakfast, thereafter. This will help to ease the financial burden on parents and guardians. We are championing change by cushioning the cost of living crisis.

As another element of the E.A.S.E. programme, we commit to rolling out a transportation subsidy for students in areas not served by the JUTC (which has provided subsidized fares for children and the elderly since it commenced operation under a PNP administration). Our Rural Initiative for Delivering Education (RIDE) programme will assist rural students with their weekly public transportation costs. Children in Westmoreland and St Elizabeth; students from Manchester and Clarendon; young people from Portland and St Ann... from all across the island in rural parishes will benefit. We need to give the next generation a better chance. We are championing change.

The existing arrangements under PATH target only 7,500 students. Our aim is to expand it to 50,000 students over the next three years, and further after that if necessary. We will deliver this programme by leveraging technology, ensuring accountability and transparency. We will also partner with the schools, licensed transport operators and service stations to deliver the RIDE programme via a cash-free system. We will say more about this programme at an appropriate time.

In keeping with our belief in a solid grounding in ethics, we will equip our students with an understanding of the constitution and their rights, and with social skills based on wholesome values and attitudes. A start has been

made. There is more to be done. We will deepen and entrench civics education as a core subject in the national curriculum. We will build the teachings of the Rt. Excellent Marcus Mosiah Garvey into the school curriculum. This will be at all levels on an age-appropriate basis, to encourage self-belief, personal responsibility and self-actualization in the nation's youth.

The funding to support children with special needs is woefully inadequate. We will provide resources to place emphasis on the diagnosis of learning disabilities, and strengthen the shadow support and other measures to support the education of children with special needs and their families.

At the tertiary level, Jamaica is lagging behind in producing an educated workforce to drive national development, with less than 30% of eligible students enrolled in tertiary education. We will provide one full scholarship for a university degree per family. This will provide an avenue of social mobility for each family, and encourage broader participation in tertiary education in Jamaica.

The next PNP government will go further than they have when it comes to student loans. We will cap loan payments for borrowers from the Students' Loan Bureau at a manageable percentage of his/her income. In periods of unemployment we will suspend loan payments and tack them on to the

back end of their loans, without penalties. Young professionals who borrowed student loans to invest in their education will no longer have to fret about the shackle of a bad credit score through no fault of their own.

We will also have a special amnesty programme to allow students who are now in default to bring their loans current without incurring penalties and arrears interest.

Jamaica is suffering high rates of attrition from the teaching profession. Classroom teachers are feeling under-appreciated and leaving in droves for better pay and working conditions elsewhere. We need to encourage bright and committed Jamaicans to go into and stay in the teaching profession.

We need to reverse this trend by encouraging bright and committed Jamaicans to go into and stay in the teaching profession. We will:

- ensure that teachers receive student debt reductions and motor vehicle concessions at levels that increase with their years of service in the profession;
- ensure that teachers benefit from enhanced access to NHT loans, and are given priority in housing allocations in NHT-financed schemes;

- remove all taxes on laptops and tablets for students and teachers;
and
- negotiate package deals to provide teachers with free internet service as a tool of their trade.

Data shows that the productivity of the Jamaican economy has been in long-term decline. Most of our employed workforce are in low skilled, low paying jobs, and approximately 60% of our workers have no formal certification (75% of employed men and 55% of employed women). We need to reduce the number of Jamaicans without certification. This has been a longstanding problem. No solution has been offered in ten years.

The next PNP government will reinvigorate Jamaica's systems of skills training and certification. That will help our national productivity to increase dramatically, so we can attract investment in high value-added industries that provide well-paying jobs for our people, globally. This way we can put an end to the calls for the importation of labour.

We will establish state of the art vocational labs in all high schools, entrenching the vocational pathway in the 7 year secondary experience that leads to level 4 certification by graduation.

We will revitalize and repurpose HEART so that it provides the training opportunities needed to build a fit-for-purpose workforce that is geared to meet the evolving needs of the 21st century economy.

We also recognize the benefits of training in the private sector. It is typically more geared towards the actual knowledge and skills which businesses need to compete and expand. The competitiveness of our economy will therefore benefit from a significant expansion of the investment in training at the firm level. We will use HEART's resources to incentivize businesses to invest in training. We will match, dollar for dollar, the amount that a business spends on training.

Energy

Our policies for Energy, our third 'E', are critical for building a more efficient, competitive and resilient economic base for our country. Energy impacts every other sector of the economy. Weak policy execution for Energy means a weak economy overall.

Electricity prices in Jamaica are also way too high, undermining the competitiveness of our economy and hurting consumers. When we left office in 2016, the cost of electricity per kilowatt hour (KWH) was USD 26

cents per KWH. It is now over USD 40 cents. The price has just about doubled under this Government.

The existing all-island electricity licence held by JPSCo comes to an end in 2027. The initiation of related negotiations must commence this year, and we expect to be leading this. The process must be pursued with great diligence, expertise and vision, to ensure a more responsive and forward-looking approach to customers' needs. Greater climate resilience of the country's transmission and distribution system must be part of the mix.

This Government has failed to issue regular Request For Proposals (RFPs) for additional renewable energy. There has only been one in their nine years. We will prioritise achieving the renewable energy target of 33% by 2030. We intend to issue utility-scale RFPs every 2 to 3 years, to achieve our renewable energy target.

There is an important social dimension to the high cost of electricity. Theft is a major problem for the economic viability of the electricity system, and exposes many families to legal and fire risks. For some time now, including in my budget presentation in March last year, I called for the government to get behind a massive drive to assist informal consumers of electricity to get regularized and become lawful customers of JPSCo.

In 2014 we did a pilot in several communities, and I urge the government to reexamine the outcomes of that pilot so that as many people as possible can become lawful customers on the grid.

I acknowledge the effort announced last Tuesday, but \$1 Billion is not enough to make the level of impact that it needed. At \$50,000 per household, this will only extend to 20,000 households (i.e. about 300 households per constituency). That will barely scratch the surface. The Survey of Living Conditions indicates that there are 1 million households in Jamaica but only approximately 700,000 residential customers on the grid, indicating that the need extends to 300,000 households.

Our plan for this important activity is more extensive. We see it as a crucial socio-economic imperative to decriminalize the electricity consumption of the many Jamaicans who cannot afford to undertake the process of regularization on their own. We are determined to empower these otherwise upstanding citizens to become lawful customers of the utility.

It will reduce the risk of electrical fires which are so prevalent in these communities. It will provide a recognized proof of address to open bank accounts and for other processes of inclusion in society. And it will reduce the non-technical losses that pushes up the price of electricity for JPSCo's customer base.

We will invest in an electricity empowerment programme. It will cover the cost for low-income households to regularize their electricity connections (rewiring, inspection and certification), provide the incentive of a credit against their light bills for a period after they become customers, and provide their homes with solar panels to reduce their electricity bills and build climate sustainability.

Solarizing homes in these communities will make their electricity consumption more affordable, and also creates the capacity to interconnect them into microgrids to achieve further efficiencies and savings for residents, as has been done successfully in Bangladesh.

Reducing prices; increasing access with dignity; and improving efficiencies - that's the way we will champion positive change in Energy.

Emerging Industries

Our Finance spokesman spoke of four emerging industries to drive growth through economic diversification and innovation. These sectors have never been central to a growth plan in Jamaica. I wish to say some more today on one of them, the cultural and creative industries.

Cultural & Creative Industries

Jamaica has a proven competitive advantage in the cultural and creative industries. Our culture and its many creative manifestations, be it in music, culinary arts, film, drama, and our national language, have become immensely popular and influential all over the world.

The success achieved by our creative practitioners over the years has, for the most part, been through their own efforts and genius. The State has largely failed to put in place the strategic laws and systems, and the institutional and physical structures, to support our creative entrepreneurs and practitioners.

There was a time when the absence of State support did not seem to keep this industry back, but times have changed. We are now seeing a decline in the global prowess of our creative output, especially in popular music. Other countries and regions have developed their own genres that draw heavily on our reggae and dancehall. They are seeing great global success, while we seem to be moving backwards.

As a priority, the next PNP government will engage our creative practitioners through our progressive framework, which is a growth and development strategy for their sector. Our National Plan will bring

sustainable solutions to support critical areas, such as access to finance, education, training, and international marketing support. We will provide an ecosystem that encourages local and international private sector investment in this sector. We will also expand the funding footprint of the creative sectors with a \$1 billion fund for support and development.

We will promote content production and intellectual property development. This will include a recording and rehearsal studio programme providing funding and technical assistance to build community and home studios and art-making spaces island-wide. This will provide additional pathways to wealth creation for youths who have tremendous talent and passion for generating creative products. Registered creative practitioners will also benefit from a tools-of-trade import tax exemption on their instruments and equipment.

Live entertainment is already a significant contributor to the economy, and has the potential to do much more. We will also support the emergence of a full year-round calendar of entertainment and cultural events and activities for the local and international marketing of the industry. We remain committed to the establishment of properly equipped 24-hour entertainment zones in suitable locations across Jamaica.

We are disappointed by the very slow pace of disbursement to film projects from the funding that was provided in last year's budget to support film production. Not one of the over 400 applicants has yet received funds after the announcement last year. Jamaica clearly has capacity to grow as a destination for international film production, but the applicable tax rules, and the processes for seamless and low cost importation and re-export of required film production inputs (like equipment, props and costumes), need to put on a clear and investor-friendly footing. We will do so.

Last year I committed to conferring the Order of National Hero on the Honourable Robert Nesta 'Bob' Marley. This will be a priority action when we form the government, the year in which we celebrate the 80th year of his birth.

As we cement the spirit of "One Love" in Jamaica; we will also commemorate the significance of "Fi Wi Language" in our expressions and identity. We will also confer the Order of National Hero on the Honourable Louise Bennett Coverley, making her our second female National Heroine.

GROWTH, OPPORTUNITY AND PROGRESS FOR ALL

The difficulty many Jamaicans are experiencing financially is matched by deficiencies in five sectors driven by public service delivery - Citizen

Security and Social Transformation, Land and Housing, the Maintenance of Roads, Agriculture and Food Security and Healthcare. Among the many gaps in the current policies, there is the deep sense of insecurity faced by Jamaicans affected by these deficiencies. Our policies focus on filling those gaps.

Crime, Citizen Security & Social Transformation

After eight years of escalating violence under the JLP administration, in 2024 the number of murders, for the first time under this JLP administration, returned to the lower range that obtained in the previous PNP administration. This year, murders are down quite significantly (-30%) versus last year (2024), a trend which every well-thinking Jamaica wishes to continue.

This reduction is a testament to the effectiveness of targeted policing strategies, over the ineffective States of Emergency (SOEs) previously employed by the Andrew Holness administration. The People's National Party (PNP) has long advocated for data-driven, focused action to combat crime. Our stance has been validated by the recent success from security forces' adoption of these strategies. This progress, though overdue, offers hope for a safer Jamaica.

The PNP's principled stance against what we believe, on legal advice, to have been the serial and routine use of unconstitutional and ineffective SOEs, has been vindicated by the decline in murders since the Opposition stopped supporting the 90-day extensions. Our resolute position on this matter, together with the various court challenges by us and by others, have curtailed the use of SOEs that had been widespread from 2017 through 2023. The few declarations of SOEs in 2024 and 2025 have been short-lived and merely performative.

This constitutes a time when an Opposition, through its lack of support for the SOE extensions in Parliament and its challenge in court, has changed policy to ensure a more effective, just and better outcome for the people.

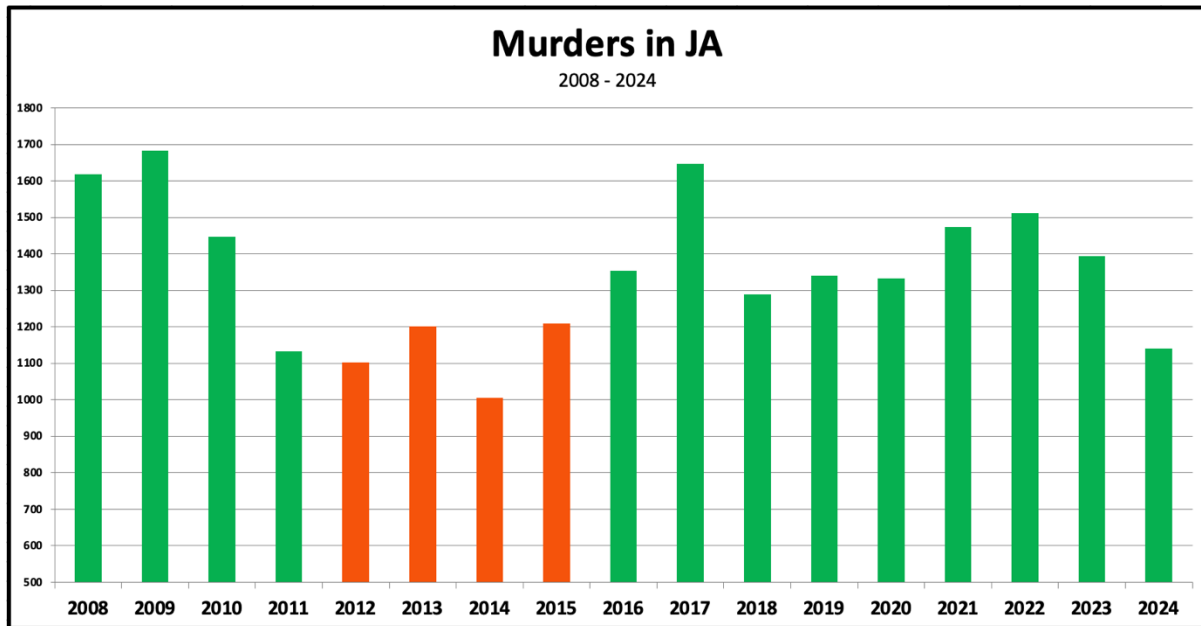
The adamant reliance on SOEs proved to be a costly misstep. Aimed at projecting toughness, the SOEs failed to dismantle criminal networks or address the root causes of violence. Instead, they eroded community trust and diverted critical resources. In contrast, the PNP's advocacy for selective targeting of violent criminals has shown measurable success, without the economic damage or stigmatization caused by locking down entire communities.

So, while we welcome the decline in murder in recent times, the Andrew Holness administration must be held accountable for the eight years when

they stubbornly refused to abandon that SOE policy, resulting in 2,300 more murders occurring (a 25% increase) than if they had just maintained the average annual number of murders that he inherited from the previous PNP administration.

Furthermore, this Prime Minister holds the dubious distinction that more Jamaicans have been murdered under his leadership as Prime Minister than in two terms under any previous Prime Minister.

While 2024's numbers are encouraging, it is critical to assess the eight preceding years of stagnation and missed opportunities in crime reduction. Under the PNP's administration from 2012 to 2015, the average annual murder figure was 1,129 — still high, but the lowest in two decades. By contrast, the JLP's first eight years (2016–2023) averaged 1,416 murders annually, a 25% increase that resulted in 2,300 more lives lost than if the PNP's numbers had been maintained.



Nevertheless, Jamaica’s homicide rate still remains alarmingly high, and this is compounded by an increase in *mass shootings*. Furthermore, financial crimes, that are estimated to fleece victims of over one billion US dollars annually, remain *untracked* by the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) in their weekly Serious & Violent Crimes Report. These crimes often fund organized violence, and need to be addressed through comprehensive tracking and enforcement.

Our policy is to build on the recent trends back in the direction we left it and make the improvements sustainable. To do so, we cannot only rely on hard policing. A balanced approach is needed to tackle the root causes of crime.

The adoption of a public health approach to violence prevention, as seen in the private sector's Project STAR, aligns with the PNP's earlier Unite for Change initiative. This model treats violence similarly to a contagious disease, and addresses root causes such as poverty, poor socialization, unemployment, and inadequate education. Jamaica has an opportunity to re-embrace this model and lead by example.

To solidify the recent gains, Jamaica must adopt a comprehensive, holistic approach to crime reduction:

- We will target interventions on the small percentage of people and places which are responsible for most of the violence. This includes enacting legislation along the lines we proposed in 2023, for a court-supervised process of pre-charge detention of serious criminals on whom there is credible intelligence. This will facilitate prosecutable cases being built and charges being laid within a prescribed timeframe, without violating constitutional rights. It will be supported by extending the Jamaica Eye system of cameras to serve strategic areas not presently covered, and support it with adequate maintenance arrangements.
- We will balance enforcement with prevention. Law enforcement should focus on violent offenders, while community programmes

address underlying causes of violent crime like poverty, trauma, social exclusion and lack of opportunities. This dual strategy reduces harm, and fosters trust between communities and police.

- We will invest in individuals at risk, especially youths, through a strategy of Social Transformation. This will help individuals manage anger, impulsive behaviours, and conflict. It will support programs that interrupt cycles of violence, like the Peace Management Initiative (PMI), and address the root causes of violent behaviour to mitigate the likelihood of future offenses. It will also provide training for employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, financial literacy, conflict resolution and overall civility.
- We will rely on data and evidence, using rigorous data analysis to guide policy decisions, to assess programme effectiveness, and to ensure resources are allocated efficiently.

While the reduction in crime celebrated today is a step in the right direction, the journey is far from over. Enforcement alone is insufficient. Jamaica must address the underlying conditions that perpetuate violence. By building peace, law and order from the ground up, the nation can pave the way for a brighter and safer future.

Land & Housing

Every Jamaican aspires to own their own home, yet Jamaica faces a 190,000-unit housing deficit, which has forced 21% of our population into informal settlements. The prevalence of inequitable land distribution and unaffordable housing fuel inter-generational poverty and crime. It is time for real solutions, not photo ops for a PR exercise in social housing that will not move the needle.

Under this government, the performance of the National Housing Trust (NHT) continues to be underwhelming, to say the least. To quote the February 22025 Fiscal Policy Paper:

“The NHT estimates slower than planned execution of its housing projects”, it says, and it later continues - “The Trust expects to commence construction of 6,366 housing units, compared to its original target of 15,009 and estimates to complete construction of 2,754, compared to its original target of 3,664. This has contributed to a \$15.3 billion underspend in its housing expenditure which stems predominantly from delays in the execution of its Guaranteed Purchase Programme.”

The political organization that I lead views shelter and housing as a basic socio-economic right, rather than a privilege. We have a proud legacy where housing is concerned. We do not bulldoze the homes of vulnerable families, like what took place at Clifton near Bernard Lodge. We do not evict longstanding occupiers of land with well-established homes, as was attempted at Mount Pleasant near Luidas Vale. We would not take NHT funds to build houses that cost \$29 and \$38 million, when there is such a dire shortage of affordable houses for young professionals and public sector workers.

With a focus on building houses that are affordable to the people, next PNP administration will take a four-pronged strategy to tackling the housing crisis:

- Our first strategy is a set of measures relating to the National Housing Trust (NHT):
 - We will stop the annual extraction of the \$11.4 billion from the NHT to fund the Budget. This was a 4-year fiscal measure in the hardest of times during a tough IMF programme. It was never our intention that it would go beyond 2017, but this government, having criticised it so trenchantly when they were in opposition, even supporting an unsuccessful lawsuit to

challenge it, then turned around and extended it by an additional 8 years since 2017, including once again in this budget for 2025/26.

We will end this annual extraction of resources from the NHT, and recapitalize the NHT with lands to restore value for the \$136.8 billion that has been taken from it to fund the successive Budgets over the past 12 years. We will also repurpose the NHT and have it focus on its core mandate of providing affordable housing to contributors.

Using this recapitalization mechanism, we will exclude the cost of the land from the price of houses built by the NHT over the next five years, and pass through a reduction of between \$2.5 million and \$3 million to contributors purchasing those homes. That is social and economic justice for the contributors whose institution has been depleted of resources to ease the fiscal burden on the country.

Teachers, nurses, police officers and other public servants, young professionals, persons with disabilities and indeed any individual contributing to the NHT will be able to own their homes.

- The PNP knows that public sector workers are hurting from the way in which the pay rationalization was done, so we have come up with these measures to show our appreciation for your service to the nation. Our second strategy is a special NHT package of benefits for public servants, young people and low wage earners.

Firstly, public sector workers used to enjoy a preferred interest rate on their NHT loans, but this government took it away. We will restore public sector workers' access to a reduction in their NHT interest rates, reducing their interest rates by 1% (depending on their income band, from 2% reduced to 1%, or from 4% reduced to 3%, or from 5% reduced to 4%). Police, nurses, teachers, doctors, firefighters and all other public servants will get back this benefit.

Secondly, we will give public sector workers a break when it comes to commencing their loan payments. Currently, when a NHT loan is disbursed, the borrower must commence payment in the following month. We recognize that buying a home can have lots of other costs attached. We will therefore allow public sector workers a 3-month moratorium period after their NHT

loan disbursement before they commence loan payments, giving them more time to recover from the expenses, buy furniture and get their place ready to move in.

And we have one more goody for our public sector workers. Currently the debt service ratio (DSR) required by the NHT is 33.3%, meaning that the loan payments cannot exceed 33.3% of their gross salary. We will extend a preferred 40% debt service ratio to public sector workers for their NHT loans, allowing them room to borrow a larger loan from the NHT to buy their home.

- We recognize that often the hardest hurdle for young people in buying a home is the deposit. Well, we have you in mind. The next PNP government will establish a special Young Owners Deposit Fund of \$1 Billion within the NHT, using its resources to enable young persons under 35 years old to access \$500,000 towards their deposit once they have been a NHT contributor for at least two years. They will be able to apply to the NHT and get their \$500,000 Deposit Grant. Time come for young Jamaicans to own their homes!

- The cost of home insurance continues to increase. Last year alone, insurance increased by over 25% on peril insurance and this was passed on to NHT mortgagors as it is wrapped up in their monthly mortgage payments. This is particularly hard on NHT borrowers in the lowest band, who earn \$30,000 per month or less. They also need a break. The next PNP government will help these low income NHT borrowers by absorbing the cost of the insurance on their homes. This means that their monthly payments will be lower, and that they will be able to afford a bigger mortgage loan.
- Many people earn their living in the informal sector and are unable to produce a pay slip to establish their income. Many other people have formal employment, but end up paying rent because they cannot save enough for the deposit to pay down on a house. We will roll out the NHT rent-to-own plan to address these two situations:
 - (a) A person earning in the informal economy who wants to buy a NHT house will be able to go into possession as a tenant paying a monthly rent equivalent to a mortgage loan payment and, by establishing their ability to pay over a short

period of time they will be then be deemed eligible to access the mortgage loan from NHT to buy the house.

- (b) The other person, who cannot save enough to pay the deposit to buy a house, will be able to rent a NHT house under the NHT rent-to-own programme, and once a specified portion of the rent payments (we are considering from 50% to 75%) adds up to the deposit he/she will be treated as having paid the deposit and can access a mortgage for the balance to buy the house.

This rent-to-own programme provides a creative solution to two of the main hurdles to home-ownership in Jamaica.

- The second part of our housing strategy is to make the Housing Agency of Jamaica (HAJ) the lead developer for low-income housing in the island. Most private developers have not been focusing on affordable housing because the return on investment is not as attractive as in the middle to upper income bands of the market. However, approximately 50% of NHT contributors earn less than \$30,000 per week, and they cannot find a house on the market that falls within their income band. The government has a duty to protect its citizens, and we will be using the HAJ to drive the construction of

low-income housing. Our plan is to build 50,000 affordable houses over the next five years.

These will be one-bedroom starter units. There is a cultural practice here that when you sell a Jamaican a starter unit, we will expand on it and build their own castle. Just look at Portmore and the many other communities I have already mentioned, and you will see. And, as I have said, contributors to the NHT who are purchasing these houses will not have to pay for the land portion of the overall value, increasing the affordability and investment value to these buyers.

We have already started to develop a database of government lands that are available for housing. These are being identified across the island. When we form government, we will not be sitting and waiting for lands to be identified, as the work is already being done.

- The third part of our housing strategy is to roll out the Programme for the Orderly Renewal and Transformation of Infrastructure in all Areas (which we have named in honour of PORTIA). We will be building social houses, tearing down zinc fences and replacing them with concrete walls. We will be constructing sidewalks to facilitate ease of movement for persons with disabilities and senior citizens. And, most importantly, we will be completing all those Operation PRIDE projects

that have been left unfinished, which this government has ignored over the past nine years. Our goal is to bring dignified housing and create secure, organised communities out of these informal settlements.

We will complete the outstanding infrastructure and bring land titling services to vulnerable residents in informal settlements, with reasonable and affordable terms of cost reimbursement.

In order to fund the PORTIA Plan, we will be using a mixture of sources. We will be using funds from the Consolidated Fund, and some of the profits generated from the low-income houses built by the HAJ. I will also ensure that the PORTIA Plan is supported by a robust and transparent governance and accountability structure.

- The fourth plank of our housing strategy involves joint ventures and other partnerships with private developers. We will “crowd in” private investment in the underserved market segments by a range of creative incentives to make the return on investment sufficiently attractive to private developers.

We have developed these strategies because something transformational is required in affordable housing. We will deliver transformation by

repurposing the NHT to focus on its core mandate. We will deliver transformation in reducing the cost of these affordable houses through land reform. We will deliver transformation in focusing HAJ to build 50,000 low-income houses. We will deliver transformation through the PORTIA initiative. And we will deliver transformation through credible and progressive management of the housing sector.

Maintenance of Roads

Jamaica's road infrastructure is in crisis, with systemic failures due to inadequate maintenance, underfunding, political interference, and lack of technical oversight. This has been compounded by the dissolving of the road maintenance fund in 2017 by the Andrew Holness Administration.

We do not accept the government's assertion that climate change is the cause of the deplorable road conditions all across Jamaica. The root of the problem is the lack of a systematic approach to road maintenance, and in particular routine maintenance by competent road contractors who are held accountable for the work they are paid to do. This failure is worsened by the lack of proper drainage, poor quality materials, and incompetent construction techniques.

The consequences of poor road conditions include increased vehicle repair costs, longer travel times, increased costs of travel, a declining public transport system, reduced national productivity, and rising road fatalities linked to substandard infrastructure.

The National Road Safety Council has noted the disturbing increase in road fatalities. For the period 2014 to 2017 the average road fatalities were about 350, but this has since escalated to well over 400 and even 450 fatalities for the year, directly linking substandard road conditions to the increase in accidents and fatalities. The nation remembers the shocking newspaper cover story of the man who apparently drowned in a pothole. We cannot, in good conscience, accept such preventable tragedies as the new normal.

The state of Jamaica's roads are undoubtedly the worst they have been in living memory. The nation's potholes have become a symbol of the failure of this government's promise of prosperity. After 9 years of glaring neglect, government initiatives like REACH and SPARK are in reality just temporary and inadequate fixes. Indeed, the major project, SPARK, will only address 4% of the road network.

What about the other 96% of the road network that serves the families in the rural communities? What about the roads that serve the yam and

banana farmers in Muirhouse, St. Ann and the coffee farmers in Llandewey, St. Thomas?

It is apparent that the National Works Agency (NWA) is overwhelmed and lacks resources, resulting in haphazard patchwork solutions rather than durable repairs. The original intention was for the NWA to be equipped as the nation's leading engineering and implementation agency. However, it has been reduced to overseeing the occasional bridge programme and managing patching works.

The state of the road network is testimony to inadequate technical oversight, lack of accountability and a loss of value for money. Technical experts have warned us that the NWA is short staffed and cannot be its own performance auditor. There is an urgent need for independent oversight, better planning, and technological integration to ensure taxpayer funds are spent effectively. Indeed, the sudden announcement of World Bank involvement signals that restructuring and urgent institutional strengthening are overdue.

We have listened to the voices of Jamaicans demanding safer and more reliable roads. The next PNP government will introduce a structured reform that includes independent technical oversight, a revival of regional public

works teams, and the certification of local contractors to ensure accountability and long-term sustainability.

We will ensure that repairs and routine maintenance are done professionally, consistently, and economically. Local teams, supported by training from institutions like HEART/NSTA Trust and the University of Technology, will enhance local skills development and ensure higher quality and accountability. We must bring an end to potholes the size of ponds engulfing main thoroughfares like Spanish Town road and Howard Cooke Boulevard. Regional teams will address these urgent issues with the assistance of skilled and certified local contractors.

We will move towards a system of independent engineering oversight for all major road projects. We will leverage the bright young minds of professionals graduating from UTECH, UWI, UCC and HEART, and pair them with the experienced technocrats of the NWA and Municipal Corporations, to provide proper technical oversight of road projects.

We will put in place a strategic, 10-year national road maintenance and rehabilitation plan. It will move away from reactive patchwork solutions to preventative maintenance and strategic resource allocation, saving billions long-term and delivering sustained improvements. With the input of our bright young professionals, we will integrate modern technologies, such as

AI-driven road condition assessment tools, in the management of the maintenance of our roads. This will predict road deterioration and recommend precise maintenance interventions, thereby reducing overall costs.

A comprehensive drainage programme is essential for road longevity. The absence of such a programme has caused persistent flooding and deteriorating roads. We will establish a comprehensive drainage programme, working from a detailed list of the priority areas needing urgent attention across the country. We have already compiled this list, with expert assistance.

Agriculture & Food Security

Jamaica is blessed with high-quality agricultural crops for which there is well-established demand and great potential for further growth, but domestic production continues to under-perform due to a variety of deficiencies in the local systems of agricultural production. The value of food imports has grown by approximately US\$600 million (or 75%) over the past decade. This represents both a threat to our food security, and an opportunity to grow local production.

We see a real opportunity for Jamaica to grow local production. We have established a target of a reduction in the food importation bill by 25% over five years. That is 5% per year. This is consistent with the decision within Caricom to reduce extra-regional food imports by 25% by 2025. We will begin what they should have had ending, and here's how:

- During the last PNP administration Minister Roger Clarke removed Irish potato from the importation basket, but that has been reversed under this government. The next PNP government will ensure that we become self-sufficient in Irish potato and onion production again.
- The expansion of the school feeding program will benefit local farmers, who will provide food grown locally.
- We will establish Special Economic Zones for agriculture, focusing on export-led production for the crops in which Jamaica enjoys a competitive advantage, such as yam, spices like ginger, turmeric, nutmeg and pimento, as well as our orchard breadfruit, mango, and medicinal ganja.
- An agriculture management system will be implemented to keep track of what crops are under production, their maturity dates and expected yield. This will enable better management of local production and the

data-driven control of food imports. An app will also put farmers directly in touch with buyers in the trade.

- We will provide a dedicated source of financial support for local food productions by establishing an Agricultural Development Fund, funded from the existing import taxes on imported food. For example, an earmarked reallocation of 1% of food import taxes would raise approximately J\$2.5 billion per annum for the Fund. It will provide much-needed assistance for local farmers in relation to essential inputs like tools, equipment and machinery, and water storage and irrigation systems. It will also help farmers with land preparation, produce storage facilities, and access to finance.

This reallocation of existing resources to a Fund dedicated to local agricultural production is justified since much of the imported food benefits from substantial subsidies in the exporting countries. Food imports also sometimes adversely affect the local market, hurting local farmers who are already producing those crops.

The Fund will be instrumental in reducing post-harvest losses from 30% where it is now, our target being to reduce these losses to no more than 20% in our first term. It will also enable the increase of irrigation from the

existing 12% of arable lands, our target being to increase this to at least 25% in our first term.

The next PNP government will strengthen Jamaica's food security and expand the irrigation and research capabilities in the sector by implementing the Sustainable Management of Agriculture through Research and Technology (SMART) Programme. We are moving agriculture from hoe and machete to adopting modern technology. The measures under our SMART programme have already been announced. Some highlights are:

- Increasing the productivity of our farmers through the introduction of improved climate- smart farming systems and technology-driven farming operations;
- repairing our farm roads to enable our farmers to access their farms and transport their produce to market;
- engaging 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;
- strengthening the arrangements to protect farmers from agricultural theft, including aggressively utilizing the Proceeds of Crime Act

regime to take the profits from agricultural criminals who reap what our farmers sow.

We will revive state support in the areas of marketing and distribution, including having clean markets with suitable facilities, so that vendors and customers can conduct their business in dignity.

We will facilitate the deepening of the linkages between farmers and the other sectors of the economy, especially hotels and restaurants, with the aim of significantly increasing the volume of locally-produced foods purchased by hotels.

The medical and therapeutic cannabis industry is crying out for regulatory reform. We will overhaul the current system of regulation, and ensure inclusion of small farmers in the industry by reducing the barriers to entry and encouraging linkages to well capitalized processors. We will also facilitate home-based production of ganja integrating with licensed processors.

There are 262,000 registered farmers in Jamaica, and 80% of economic activity in rural Jamaica is directly linked to agriculture. We are making our farmers a priority for the next PNP government. Hold on, help is on the way. A better life is ahead for Jamaica's farmers.

Healthcare

Jamaica's public health system has reached a critical breaking point, marked by equipment failures, industrial action from almost every level of staff, as well as overcrowded, deteriorating facilities.

The current administration's focus on public relations over effective service delivery has led to a near collapse of the public health sector. It is heartbreaking to watch the news or scroll through social media knowing that every week it is another grieving family crying out for a change.

The debacle of the Cornwall Regional Hospital renovation, which after seven years has seen its budget explode from \$2 billion to \$21 billion and counting but is still nowhere near to completion, is a testament to the shambolic project execution of this government. It is a travesty that no-one has been held accountable for this unmitigated disgrace.

The PNP will undertake a major policy shift, from a focus on mega infrastructure projects towards enhancing the delivery of healthcare across Jamaica's clinics and hospitals. Patients go to a hospital or clinic to be diagnosed and treated, to return home alive and well. Jamaicans are crying out for this lack of basic services to be fixed, and we will fix it.

Jamaica's health system needs to pivot towards primary care and focus on extensive screening. 70% of colon cancers in Jamaica are now diagnosed at advanced stages. 90% of breast cancers are detected by a lump over a year after the cancer started. Prostate cancer is primarily diagnosed after it has spread. 50% of diabetic and 40% of hypertensive patients have no idea that they have that disease. And tragically, the entirely preventable cervical cancer continues to claim the lives of our women.

We will launch national screening programmes to identify the diseases that are the top killers of Jamaicans, and treat them early and more effectively. Prevention and early treatment are easier, cheaper and more effective than late cures. Treating high blood pressure and diabetes effectively in our clinics will decrease the number of strokes, heart attacks, amputations and kidney failures that are now overburdening the hospitals, burdening livelihoods and claiming lives.

In spite of grand announcements about rehabilitation of health facilities, multiple operating theatres remain non-functional today at major institutions, including KPH, Cornwall Regional Hospital, St. Ann's Bay, Annotto Bay and the National Chest Hospital. Under the next PNP government, every operating theatre will be refurbished so each patient, instead of waiting years for surgery, will be able to have their procedures

done quickly in well-equipped, modern facilities. We will move from the cutting of ribbons today, to the cutting of hernias tomorrow.

Emergency departments are severely overcrowded with patients who could be treated in urgent care facilities and sent home. We will create urgent care centres islandwide, where patients will have the option of not only seeing a doctor but having the relevant tests available for diagnosis and treatment. This, along with the expansion of emergency rooms and wards, will lead to shorter waiting times, and end patients having to sleep on benches and floors, once and for all.

The country is witnessing healthcare workers at all levels, from support staff to for the first time in our history, medical consultants, taking industrial action due to poor working conditions, inadequate compensation, and mounting frustration with the system's deficiencies. Proper healthcare cannot be delivered by demoralized staff. The next PNP government will prioritize service delivery over optics and gimmicks. We will ensure that staff are motivated, trained and retained in the system, through incentives such as sponsorships for advanced training, housing provisions and adequate compensation.

The current government's approach of outsourcing diagnostic services instead of investing in hospital equipment has resulted in the accumulation

of significant debt to private contractors. This causes service suspensions which force patients to pay for private services. We will prioritize the presence of functional radiology equipment in every parish hospital, and put an end to hospital patients waiting on ambulances to take them elsewhere for urgent scans. We will ensure that every parish has a CT scan machine.

The current administration seems to be averse to maintenance. Nonfunctional equipment is a testament to their lack of attention to preventative maintenance. Broken and non-functional ventilators, ambulances, diagnostic equipment and even air conditioning units are usually the reason why critical services cannot be delivered.

Preventative maintenance is needed to prevent us from ever getting back to this situation. Regular maintenance of standardized equipment will be a key priority for the next PNP administration. We will strengthen the Health Facilities Maintenance Unit through proper staffing and resources.

We recognize that there is little consideration for the immense value of volunteers contributing to our health sector. Medical missions, health fairs and volunteer work bring healthcare to thousands of Jamaicans annually. We want to recognize the efforts of the Good Samaritans who make this

possible, not only by conveying our sincerest gratitude, but by committing to make it easier for them to do the Lord's work.

We will augment the services offered to facilitate the delivery of voluntary healthcare, and cut through the bureaucracy that complicates and frustrates health donations. For example, the next PNP administration will support health fairs and clinics so that no parent will have to pay for a school medical for their child to attend school each September.

Our commitment to improving service delivery over the promises of "soon done" refurbishments will improve healthcare delivery and save countless lives. We put people first, not the ribbon-cutting of buildings.

Better Opportunities

Jamaicans want new and better opportunities to improve their quality of life. I will now outline how we intend to create better opportunities through a new deal for our workers, greater care of persons with disabilities and a focus on support for senior citizens, building on the measures to support MSMEs announced by our Spokesperson for Finance last Thursday.

A New Deal for our Workers

As I have mentioned, this year is the 100th anniversary of the birth of former Prime Minister Michael Manley, himself a former labour leader. It is also the 50th anniversary year of the establishment of the Industrial Disputes Tribunal in 1975 under his government, which gives access to justice to the workers of Jamaica. Time come to once again move the agenda forward for our workers.

Contract work is often used as a loophole which denies workers the basic set of rights and benefits to which they are intended to be entitled under Jamaican law. The abuse of contract work must be brought to an end. This government has merely begun to tinker with the problem in sections of the public sector, but has totally ignored the problem in the wider economy.

The next PNP government will pass comprehensive legislation to eliminate abusive contractual arrangements which deny workers their basic employment rights. We will ensure the equal treatment of all genuine workers, regardless of the legal form of their contracts.

While our guide on the specific measures will be the International Labour Organization's Recommendation No. 166 of 1982, we will go through a

fulsome process of consultations with the trade unions, employer groups, sectoral groups and other key stakeholders before finalizing the legislation.

At the same time, we will take a balanced approach, and encourage employers to regularize their employment contracts. Under the Portia Simpson-Miller administration, a tax incentive called the Employment Tax Credit (ETC) was introduced. The ETC has proven to be a significant win-win for workers, the government, the private sector, and the broader economy.

It has led to the formalization of more workers as employees, granting access to rights and benefits previously denied to them, such as participation in the NHT and NIS, formal employment status to open bank accounts, and eligibility for loans from regulated lending institutions.

The incentive has also boosted corporate tax compliance, resulting in substantial increases in government revenue.

Currently, the ETC is capped at 30% of the tax chargeable on the company's or trader's trading income. As we seek to eliminate the practice of using contract work to exclude from the rights and benefits that are afforded to formalized employees, I propose increasing this to 40% of the tax chargeable. This will provide an even stronger incentive to employers to

formalize the employment of their workers, and provide balance in our quest to ensure fair and equitable employment practices across the board.

The system of minimum wage in Jamaica is in need of an overhaul. No worker should be earning a wage which is below the cost of basic decent daily life. In our first year in office I will task the Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ) to provide regarding shifting from a minimum wage to a liveable wage, which is tied to the cost of living and is renewed annually to account for accumulated inflation. The benefits of families earning a liveable wage and living above the poverty line will outweigh any temporary effects on the employment market.

Some of the industries which are the largest employers of workers in the country are characterized by a lack of worker representation. We are mindful of the series of strikes in the hotel sector last year, when the hotel workers had to take to the streets to seek redress for what they described as low pay and unacceptable working conditions.

We will pursue the establishment of Joint Industrial Councils in industries where there are high levels of employment but no common minimum standards for working conditions and no union representation. A Joint Industrial Council is a mechanism, facilitated by the State, that brings employers and employees together to negotiate and settle basic standards

relating to pay and conditions of work in the particular sector. Precedent for this exists, as it has been used in the construction industry for many years. The sense of security, fairness and dignity that this will bring to employees in these sectors will promote harmony and stability at the workplace, and increase productivity and efficiency.

Persons with Disabilities

I have been close to the community of persons with disabilities for my entire life. My father, Professor John Golding, pioneered Jamaica's only fully-integrated rehabilitation centre in response to the polio epidemic in the 1950's. Formerly called Mona Rehab, it was renamed in his honour after he passed in 1996.

He also founded the Hope Valley Experimental School as the only institution in Jamaica specifically dedicated to educating children with disabilities and able-bodied children together. Two of my parliamentary colleagues are proud graduates of that school.

My mother started her career as a public servant, but in the 1960's went to work on a voluntary basis at the Centre, where she spent the rest of her working life.

I was therefore very engaged and encouraged when the Portia Simpson-Miller administration passed the Disabilities Act in 2014, to give effect to Jamaica's obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which, under her leadership, Jamaica had proudly stepped forward as the first state to sign.

The World Health Organization estimates that approximately 16% of the country's population has some form of disability, yet less than 1% of our annual budget goes to addressing the needs of this community. Much more needs to be done to empower persons with disabilities to be fully included in all aspects of national life. With my family background, I am committed to making this happen. We must always remember that disability respects no-one, so we must create a society that is fully inclusive of all our citizens, mindful that any of us can become disabled at any time.

The next PNP government will establish the National Disability Fund (NDF) with specific allocations from the Consolidated Fund, which will be dedicated to financing initiatives to empower persons with disabilities.

These initiatives will include funding the Jamaica Council for Persons with Disabilities; greater support for the major organizations catering to each disability group; funding for assistive technologies for persons with

disabilities; improving sidewalks for use by persons with disabilities, and supporting the education of persons with disabilities at the tertiary level.

I would like to take this moment to extend congratulations to Jamaica's Special Olympics team who are back from Italy with 3 Gold Medals, 2 Silver Medals and 2 Bronze. Jamaica is truly proud.

Senior Citizens

Our senior citizens constitute a critical mass of our population, who spent their working lives helping to build our country. Data shows that seniors comprise 13.2% of our population, and the trajectory is that this percentage is growing steadily. With an aging population, Jamaica must put in place measures to protect this vulnerable group.

All too often I receive complaints from retired public servants of the long delays, sometimes years, before they start receiving the pension to which they are entitled. And then there are the frequent complaints by senior citizens that their pension payments are not being paid on time. This is unjust and needs to stop. The next PNP government commits to fixing these problems, so that retired persons receive their pension entitlements on a timely basis.

In 2021, I endorsed a motion brought to the Senate by Professor Senator Floyd Morris, calling for legislation to protect senior citizens. This motion received unanimous approval in the Senate. A Special Select Committee of the Senate has been established to examine the scope and modalities of the legislation and to make recommendations for action. The next PNP government will enact comprehensive legislation to protect senior citizens.

We will strengthen the linkages between the key agencies serving our senior citizens who need to get life certificates and other documents. We envisage the greater use of mobile units to reach more seniors, especially those living in remote areas.

Justice: Done and Seen

There is a time-worn refrain that justice must not only be done but be seen to be done. In too many cases in Jamaica neither is true. The next PNP government will focus on Social Justice, Constitutional Reform and some other vexing issues to which I turn next.

Social Justice

The situation in Jamaica with respect to beach access is unacceptable. Why should this be the country in the Caribbean that denies our people

access to most of the country's beaches? It should be a benefit and joy of island life, and we will restore it to our people.

We are committed to implementing a progressive beach access policy, to ensure that the public has reasonable access to Jamaica's beaches. 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.

Domestic and gender-based violence are a serious problem in our country. The support systems for victims need to be strengthened, and the cultural attitudes and practices that normalize the behaviour need to be re-engineered through public education and in our school system.

We will establish support centres in every parish, to provide safe havens for the survivors of domestic violence and other gender-based violence. And we will move quickly to complete the long-outstanding review of the Domestic Violence Act, and to implement the recommendations arising from that review so that there is a more effective system for holding abusers to account.

The people of Jamaica want justice in many areas of life where the system fails to protect their rights. As it stands, the Public Defender has no power to take action in court to defend those who are not able to defend themselves. We will enact legislation to empower the Public Defender to bring legal proceedings to defend the rights of vulnerable Jamaicans.

We will also 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. As Minister of Justice I started that process over a decade ago. It has been abandoned by this government.

Many disputes of a civil nature, such as issues concerning land and “dead lef” property, lead to acts of violence because people cannot afford lawyers to defend their interests. 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.

As a small island developing state, Jamaica depends on the rule of international law. We will complete the long-outstanding process of enacting legislation to enable Jamaica to accede to the jurisdiction of the

International Criminal Court. It is a missing element in the current accountability framework for those who abuse power in this country. As Minister of Justice, I started that process over a decade ago. Again, it has been abandoned by this government.

When as Minister of Justice I pioneered Jamaica's transformation in relation to the ganja industry, it was our intention that it would be a source of wealth-creation and empowerment for small farmers who developed Jamaica's ganja industry despite a century of prohibition, and for the Rastafari community and the Maroons, who have a special relationship with the herb. That process has withered to a standstill under the incompetent and vision-less leadership of the current government.

We will ensure that small farmers are empowered to participate fully in the medicinal and therapeutic ganja industry. We will also work with the Rastafari community to design an ecosystem for them to reap economic benefits from their sacramental herb, and that the Maroons can do likewise leveraging their traditional cultural knowledge of herbal medicine.

The local economy in communities across Jamaica benefits significantly from entertainment events, like round robins and fish fries. However, there is a lack of clarity as to the required arrangements. Permits are too often withheld in circumstances which lack transparency and appear unfair to

residents. The system is crying out to be overhauled and put on a clear and equitable footing.

In keeping with our belief in consultation with communities in decision-making, we will develop balanced and clear guidelines under the Noise Abatement Act for nighttime entertainment in communities.

Constitutional Reform

The People's National Party is committed to constitutional reform. Time come for full decolonization now! Jamaica must move away from the King of England as our head of state and the King's colonial era privy council as our highest court. We are a proud and mature independent nation, and must fully repatriate our sovereignty.

We reject doing this in phases, which may derail the completion of the process. I again call on the Prime Minister to state his Party's position on embracing the Caribbean Court of Justice as our final court.

The former colonies of the Commonwealth that have succeeded in moving away from the monarchy to achieve full sovereignty have done so by utilising a tried and proven formula. That formula has two limbs:

LIMB ONE: Delinking from the monarch's court, either before or at the same time as moving away from the monarchy, by faithfully following the path laid down by the Constitution for amendment of its provisions.

LIMB TWO: The political parties finding common ground, as outlined by former Prime Minister Bruce Golding in opening the debate on the Charter of Rights in this Honourable Chamber in 2011. That common ground can be reached only by means of cross-party talks.

The over 40 former colonies of Britain across the world that have moved away from the monarchy have overwhelmingly done so either after or at the same time as moving away from the monarch's court. Yet this Government won't tell Jamaica why they don't want to follow this tried and tested formula.

By proceeding as if the journey can be successfully completed unilaterally, with the support of one side of the aisle only, they have caused the reform process to become mangled.

Their approach has shown an immense lack of care and interest in the interests of the overwhelming majority of Jamaicans, who have been denied access to final justice for nearly 200 years.

Of all the countries that have successfully transitioned from the Privy Council to an accessible final appeal court (from Canada which completed the process in 1935 to St Lucia in 2023), not one of them has done so through the referendum route.

Why has that been so?

There are several reasons, the first and obvious reason being that it is quite futile to hold a referendum on an issue the possible outcome of which does not lie within our power to implement or continue. If the vote is to remain tied to the Privy Council, the power to make that happen does not lie in Jamaica; it lies within the gift of the United Kingdom alone.

There is also another powerful reason. A referendum is in essence a political exercise, and matters concerning the judicial structure should never be subjected to the harsh and often extreme banter of political platforms. It will not serve the administration of justice to subject the highest court to that risk of irreparable damage to its image, reputation and acceptance.

The Jamaican Bar Association in their public observations in 2015 stated that:

"We strongly feel that subjecting the process to a political referendum and the vagaries of our adversarial political system will impact on the dignity of the court, which may serve to put the court into disrepute".

In a similar vein, noted constitutional scholar Dr Lloyd Barnett, who advocated before the Privy Council for the two-thirds majority constitutional vote to complete the transition to the CCJ, has publicly urged the Jamaica Labour Party parliamentarians to follow that correct pathway.

There are examples right here in the Region of chaotic outcomes to such exercises held in three sister states which have a specific constitutional requirement of a referendum for transitioning from the Privy Council.

We do not support that route being followed in Jamaica. It is not in keeping with the requirements of our Constitution, as declared by the Privy Council itself in a case brought by the Jamaica Labour Party. We urge the government to abide by the ruling of the highest court in that case which they themselves brought.

How should we proceed? In the debate on the 2011 Charter of Rights, then Prime Minister Bruce Golding, after pointing to the pitfalls of the referendum route, set out the path by which the movement toward full independence must proceed to be successful:

"What the framers of the Constitution were saying is that look, there are some things that are so important that it is not a matter of counting up the votes to decide who has won; it is a matter of ensuring that both Government and Opposition can find common ground".

And what should that common ground be? The final advice of former Prime Minister Edward Seaga was to keenly follow the progress of the CCJ for an appreciable amount of time, make an assessment, and then take the next meaningful step.

With the two decades that have passed since the doors of the CCJ were opened in 2005, there has been sufficient time to assess the performance of the Caribbean Court of Justice. That assessment shows that the transition should urgently proceed, based on compelling factors:

Firstly, no complaint whatsoever has ever been heard coming from any of our five sister territories that have embraced the appellate jurisdiction of the Court. That is powerful testimony of the quality of the CCJ and the benefits of adopting it as a final court.

Secondly, the CCJ has received strong international recognition for its secure insulation from political and other external influences; for the efficiency of its operations; and for the excellent quality of its judgments.

Thirdly, it is unacceptable and indefensible that Jamaicans should be left attached to a court to which only the most wealthy have access, to the shameful situation where a Jamaican citizen needs a visa to travel to our final court, and when the solution to putting that right lies right here in our own hands as legislators.

If we undertake that assessment as recommended by Mr Seaga, the outcome is clear, and the Government and Opposition will at last have found common ground. This could be the year when the historic and empowering institution of a Caribbean final court, originally conceptualised by former Prime Minister Hugh Shearer and his cabinet colleagues back in 1970, comes to be finally acceded to by Jamaica, and justice at the highest level becomes accessible to all Jamaicans.

Prime Minister, you have a duty in this Budget debate to deliver a long-awaited explanation to the country as to why you and your government do not support the position that the Opposition confidently shares with three of your former leaders.

I move to the content of the Constitutional reform bill now in Parliament. In our view, it is fatally flawed.

Its mechanism for appointing the new President effectively places that power in the hands of the Prime Minister, a highly undesirable further concentration of power. Its modifications to the composition of the Senate removes the Opposition's ability to stand in the way of oppressive changes to entrenched constitutional protections.

It has also failed to include desirable accountability mechanisms to enhance accountability, in particular an impeachment procedure for delinquent parliamentarians, and a recall procedure for non-performing MPs.

The next PNP Government will pursue a fully participatory process of engagement with the public, first of all to design the constitutional reform process itself, and then to develop the reform recommendations. There is a lot to discuss and settle. Many Jamaicans want the right to elect their President; many want term limits and fixed election dates; we need a fulsome discussion on how our Diaspora can play a role in governance; the rights of our indigenous groups, in particular the Maroons and the Rastafari community, need to be addressed.

The Portmore Debacle

The current arrangements with respect to the governance of Portmore emerged out of a highly consultative and democratic process, led by the people of Portmore themselves. We feel strongly that the people of Portmore must be the ones to decide whether they want to give up their status as a city municipality.

After all, it enjoys some unique participatory governance innovations, such as a directly elected mayor and the inclusion of community stakeholders in committees of their council, and become another parish. A fundamental change like that should not be foisted onto them by the government of the day; and it must not be used as a backhanded device to adjust electoral boundaries to secure party political advantage.

The approach being taken by this government to the establishment of Portmore as a parish is a dangerous incursion into long-settled processes for re-establishing electoral boundaries. The gerrymandering motives behind this initiative were publicly expressed by a former member of the Cabinet of this government, and have not been refuted.

We argued strenuously and then voted against the legislation, primarily because the legislated boundaries for the new parish will necessitate the

realignment of several constituency and divisional electoral boundaries, without the settled processes led by the Electoral Commission of Jamaica having been engaged and in violation of the requirements of the Constitution.

Profound concerns with this approach have also been raised by the present and a former Chairman of the ECJ, and by a former Director of Elections, who have made it clear that, if the implementation of the legislation is not halted it will result in a constitutional crisis.

The Chairperson of the People's National Party has written to the Minister with responsibility for local government, in whose name the Bill was tabled and who piloted the legislation through this House, to seek certain assurances in this regard, but none has been forthcoming.

Since 1980 Jamaica moved to establish an electoral system in which important decisions are vested in the ECJ with bipartisan representation, and the convention is that the decisions which result from the processes followed by the ECJ are implemented with bipartisan support. This institutional innovation has contributed greatly to the elimination of political violence in our country. It is very sad to see the government going down a path that will undermine this transformational national achievement. I now

urge the Prime Minister to ensure that, as part of his legacy to Jamaica, this ill-conceived legislation is not brought into effect.

In the meantime, yesterday we filed suit in the Constitutional Court to strike down this legislation. We regard the pursuit of this legislation as a dangerous affront to our democracy which must be vigorously resisted by all lawful means at our disposal.

In the 80-year history of electoral politics in Jamaica, I have never heard of any Prime Minister before this one, whether of the PNP or JLP, declaring in an ominous tone that the Opposition *must not return to power*. That injunctive statement, repeated several times in recent weeks, carries a veiled threat to our democracy. The emergence of this threat was already presaged by previous unconstitutional conduct, like procuring pre-signed letters of resignation when appointing senators, putting the newly appointed Chief Justice on probation, and the attempted legislative gerrymandering of the electoral boundaries of Portmore.

The narrative that this Government must stay in power not only smacks of desperation, but is an imminent danger to everything Jamaicans fought for over the centuries. Such statements foster that feeling of uneasiness, the most uncomfortable feeling, that the will of the people may be undermined. No politician or government should set that tone in our democracy.

I am putting the Jamaican people on alert to protect the most cherished right fought for by our people, the right to choose their government, and to vote out one which has proved that it is no longer deserving of support.

We need an effective Political Ombudsman

The office of Political Ombudsman needs to be re-established as an independent institution, and separated from the Electoral Commission of Jamaica. It was an unwise and unsuccessful experiment to make the ECJ double up as the Political Ombudsman.

Last year's local government elections and two contested divisional by-elections showed that there is still a need for an independent officer with a specific mandate to adjudicate and rule on violations of the political code of conduct. It is an intrinsically controversial role in which the ECJ, an institution which has been built on consensus, should not involve itself.

The Fight Against Corruption

In the debate on the Bill establishing the Integrity Commission, Prime Minister Holness said "*...as a politically independent country, we could have achieved much more were it not for corruption in many forms: revenue leakage due to corrupt practices, misuse of public funds, and the*

overall perception of pervasive corruption, all of which have served to compromise the flow of investment into our country.”

Prime Minister Holness continued - *“The Economic Growth Council has also recently identified corruption as a significant retardant to growth...”*

There is no doubt that a major factor why, notwithstanding all the economic reforms implemented by Jamaica since 2013, growth remains so elusive.

Prime Minister Holness signalled it – corruption! Corruption, PM!

This helps explain why Net Foreign Direct Investment in 2023 at US\$376.5million is way below (less than half) what it was in 2015 when it was at US\$926.5million.

Corruption remains a scourge on national development, siphoning off funds and depriving our people of resources for investment in better schools, hospitals, roads and other infrastructure.

Corruption diverts resources from the intended purposes, and thereby reduces the investment in roads, water supply systems, education, hospital facilities and other public goods that are needed and demanded by the Jamaica People.

As Minister of Justice I developed the Integrity Commission legislation out of a determination to strengthen Jamaica's anti-corruption framework, to reduce the prevalence of corruption in our country. I brought the legislation to Parliament, and it went through the rigorous review of an extensive joint select committee process.

After the change of government in 2016, the legislation was ultimately passed by this government in 2017 and brought into effect in 2018. All the Commissioners and senior officials of the Commission have been appointed during the tenure of this government.

The Integrity Commission is a vital institution that needs to be protected from the current attempts to weaken and dismantle it. It is a relatively new institution, and it is our duty as parliamentarians to nurture and support it, ensuring that it has the resources and legislative support it needs to carry out its anti-corruption mandate fearlessly and fairly.

The next PNP government will ensure that it has the resources it needs to do its work effectively. We will also enhance its tools by passing legislation for Unexplained Wealth Orders, an agreed commitment on which this current government has reneged. We will amend the Act to require the public disclosure of government contracts.

On a related note, we will reintroduce the system of having the Opposition appoint the chairpersons of the various committees of Parliament tasked with monitoring the performance of the Government and holding the Executive to account.

That innovation, which promotes greater accountability and transparency in the affairs of the country, was pioneered by Bruce Golding and continued by Portia Simpson-Miller, but was unceremoniously discarded by the current government after the 2020 general elections without any hint in their manifesto that they were going down that road. We will set things right in the Parliament of the land.

The SSL scandal has rocked Jamaica's financial system and tarnished our image with investors. We again demand that all reports into what happened at SSL, including the Kroll Report and the temporary manager Ken Tomlison's report, be released to the public so that the sunlight of transparency can bring a better understanding of how our sprint icon Usain Bolt and hundreds of others got fleeced in SSL. I commit to establishing a Commission of Enquiry into the matter, focusing also on the regulatory history and how that licensed institution was able to carry down so many investors for so long.

The Opposition and the wider society remain very concerned about the Prime Minister, who has been the subject of an extensive investigation by the Commission. The report resulting from that investigation contained findings which the Opposition and many Jamaicans find very troubling. The report called for further investigation by the Financial Investigation Division and Tax Administration Jamaica, but the Prime Minister has responded by taking the Commission to court, seeking to strike down the legislation itself on which Jamaica's anti-corruption framework depends.

In the meantime, the Prime Minister's statutory declarations of assets, liabilities and income for the relevant years remain uncertified by the Commission.

This is an untenable situation which goes to the heart of governance in our country. Given that the Prime Minister has clearly decided to try to ride it out and lead his Party into the upcoming general elections, Jamaica will use that opportunity to decide whether to allow this highly undesirable state of affairs to continue.

CLOSING

We are in a year of national decision making. It is an election year.

To my fellow Jamaicans I say this. Later this year, you will have an opportunity to choose your government in a free and fair general election. We will be championing positive change. We have already begun, in this budget debate. We will be coming to you with more plans and details in the next few weeks. Examine our policies, and decide for yourselves.

My fellow Jamaicans, do not get distracted. Do not be intimidated by anyone who seems to want to rob us of our democratic way of life.

Jamaica doesn't belong to either the PNP or JLP. It belongs to all the people of Jamaica, who every 4 to 5 years determine who they want to lead them. The people of Jamaica are the title-holders of this nation.

When the time comes, we will work on behalf of all Jamaicans to build a Jamaica where everyone can live, work, raise families, do business and retire. We envision a Jamaica where everyone can thrive, live their dreams and be happy.

We champion the building of a Jamaica that is nice for everybody and not just a few. We champion the building of a Jamaica where God is at the

centre, and our values and attitudes are conducive to harmony, peace and the pursuit of happiness.

We champion a Jamaica where there is protection for the vulnerable and where justice flows like a clean and pure. Where you can imagine the life you want, and be equipped with the tools to build that life.

We come to champion a Jamaica where you can live in dignity and hold your head up high, where you feel content, respected, and truly blessed to live a we Yard.

That is what a PNP administration under my leadership will set out to do from day one. We will champion this positive Change!

I seal my commitment as a champion of positive change with these words:
(Motion everyone on our side to stand)

"I pledge my heart forever to serve with humble pride, this shining homeland ever so long as earth abides. I pledge my heart this island, as God and faith shall live, my work, my strength, my love and my loyalty to give. Oh green Isle of the Indies, Jamaica strong a free, my vow and loyal promises, oh heartland 'tis to thee."

God bless Jamaica and all who call her home.