

**ADDRESS BY
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FOR WEST PORTLAND
AND
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DIGITAL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT
IN THE
2013/14 SECTORAL DEBATE
WEDNESDAY, MAY 29, 2013
IN THE HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT**

“MOVING JAMAICA FROM RED TAPE TO RED CARPET”

Opening Remarks

Mr. Speaker, my colleagues on both sides of this Honourable House,

I rise today to firstly speak from a seat other than my own. I thank you, Mr. Speaker for your permission and wish to congratulate you on your professional handling of your task as Speaker, even at the most robust of sittings.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the leadership of my Party, past and present, for the opportunity and privilege to continue to represent the Party among the distinguished Government and Opposition parliamentary group. I also wish to thank my family for the time they have allowed me to serve my extended family, the constituents of West Portland, who have given me the vote of confidence in three (3) elections. I am grateful to God, Mr. Speaker, for His blessings of good health and strength so that I can continue to be of service to my fellow Jamaicans.

My political track record in representational politics is four successive victories and no losses, starting when I was elected as Councillor in 1986. I also have among the political firsts in the constituency of West Portland, the biggest legal bill back in 2009 in the by-election court challenge.

Mr. Speaker, constituents are demanding more visibility from their political representatives. I have learnt well the importance of being “on the ground”. I live by the motto “*serve the people and they will serve you*” and it has not failed me in my partnership and friendship with the people of West Portland.

My success in the Constituency and by extension, the Parish, must also be attributed to a dedicated team of individuals who give me full support from both sides of the political fence. I would like to acknowledge my Councillors in West Portland - Gloria Silvera, Rupert Kelly, Floyd Patterson and Caretaker, Ms. Sonia Bailey, as well as Mr. Hopeton Molloy, the only PNP Councillor. Mr. Speaker, the attendance of Councillors from the Portland Parish Council from both sides of the political divide is indeed to my knowledge unprecedented in recent times and clearly demonstrates the type of leadership and political maturity in Portland. We enjoy personal friendships and amicable working relationships with each other in the interest of the development of the Parish despite the competitiveness of the

politics with the two constituencies represented by both sides and a Council which is 5-4 in favour of the ruling Party and Government. I sincerely hope that today's public display will set an example for other Parishes to emulate as we put Portland over politics.

I wish to thank the Parish Development Committee, the Resort Board, Chamber of Commerce, the various community based organizations, NGOs, churches, and State Agencies for their work which complements my vision in the projects implemented and for that I must express my appreciation to them. They too clearly demonstrate that they also put Portland ahead of politics.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to express special thanks to my Management team, Constituency and personal staff as well as Constituency workers for their commitment on a daily basis. Last but not least, I recognise my father, former Member of Parliament from 1976 and Minister of Industry & Commerce, Mr. Douglas Vaz, in whose footsteps I have followed and who I owe much of my success in Politics and my personal development.

Mr. Speaker, before I speak to the development of my Constituency and by extension the Parish of Portland, I feel compelled to briefly speak about Hurricane Sandy and the Government's response as well as the Hurricane Sandy Relief Fund which I initiated.

As is historically the case, the eastern Parishes of St. Thomas, St. Mary and Portland suffer the brunt of our country's most common disaster, hurricanes. October 24, 2012 was no exception when Hurricane Sandy devastated these three Parishes, in particular, Portland, and caused widespread damage to homes, businesses, infrastructure and the vital agricultural sector resulting in billions of dollars in losses.

After several tours of the Parish in the aftermath of Sandy, it was evident that it would take an organized effort with as many hands on deck to rebuild and restore the lives, livelihood and properties of residents. As with every hurricane, the roofs of many landmark institutions including schools and residences were blown away while some homes were blown down in pieces. The once verdant acres of banana fields were totally wiped out. The road network was inaccessible. In light of that, you will remember my

initial call for the Parish of Portland to be declared a disaster area which was met with much opposition from the Government in fear that it would affect tourism and investment.

Hurricane Sandy / Portland Hurricane Sandy Relief Fund (PHSRF)

Although the Parish Disaster Relief Committee and the respective Ministries, Agencies and NGOs were doing the necessary assessments, I realized that I had to answer the more immediate and urgent calls for help from the thousands of affected residents by launching the Portland Hurricane Sandy Relief Fund (PHSRF) on November 1, 2012. The Fund implemented one successful fundraiser three weeks after its launch which provided well needed cash to commence the recovery exercise.

Early on board with the Fund was Food for the Poor which partnered with the Fund as its distribution arm. This partnership with Food for the Poor has enabled the handing over of a total of 32 houses to date – 10 houses each for St. Mary and St. Thomas and 12 for Portland. The additional 2 for Portland was a specific donation to West Portland by the Curran family. Each house was built at an approximate cost of Ja\$595,200.00.

It is important to note that the construction of these houses was made possible through the generous contribution of major donors, the Diageo Foundation of £40,000.00/(J\$6 million) and Supreme Venture Lotteries Limited of Ja\$3 million which FFP matched with US\$100,000.00. Through the efforts of Mrs. Sheila Alexander who co-ordinated donations in Canada, Cdn\$4,000.00 was wired to the account of the Ministry of Education for the repair of the Windsor Castle All Age school. I wish to thank the Hon. Rev. Ronald Thwaites, Minister of Education for attending the launch and giving his endorsement of the Fund.

Mr. Speaker, the rebuilding and restoration continues. Currently, through the generosity of the Carimed Foundation, repairs are being effected to the Buff Bay Police Station to the tune of Two Million (\$2 million). Another of our landmark institutions in West Portland, the Lynch Park Sports Complex, a recreational and computer facility, suffered great damage to the roof. Materials are being procured for the repairs in the amount of approximately Two Million (\$2 million). Mr. Speaker, I must thank the Buff Bay CDC, Business Watch, and the Social Development Commission for the vision they had in the redevelopment of Lynch Park.

On behalf of the Fund, our gratitude goes to those members of the public who contributed to the Fund and other donors such as Carib Cement who donated cement for reconstruction of homes and Newport Fersan (Jamaica), fertilizers for farmers.

East Jamaica Reconstruction Committee (EJRC)

I wish to commend the Prime Minister for establishing the East Jamaica Reconstruction Committee (EJRC) which brought together Food for the Poor (FFP), the relevant Ministries and Agencies responsible for co-ordinating the reconstruction efforts as well as the Members of Parliament from St. Thomas, Portland and St. Mary under the chairmanship of the Hon. Luther Buchanan, Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, this Committee was critical to the response efforts immediately after Sandy in ensuring that those who were most in need were the ones prioritised for help. The Committee continues to meet since November 2012 up until now and much of its success, Mr. Speaker, has been due to the able chairmanship of Minister Buchanan as well as the Committee whom I congratulate on their bi-partisan approach.

My personal commendation to Minister Buchanan, whom most of us in Parliament know as very vociferous but whom I give kudos for working assiduously to make the response the success that it has been to date.

The Ministries/ Agencies / ODPEM/Disaster Committees

Mr. Speaker, we know that even with the best preparatory efforts for an impending hurricane, the resources of Government are still limited to adequately deal with the aftermath. Mr. Speaker, no system is perfect and therefore I wish to acknowledge the best efforts of the Parish Disaster Committees and the Ministries led by the respective Ministers and Permanent Secretaries and State Agencies including ODPEM for rising to the challenge particularly in the speedy assessment of damage and payout of benefits to victims.

Food For the Poor (FFP)

Mr. Speaker, Food for the Poor (FFP) is well known for its charitable work, moreso with the construction of houses for the poor across Jamaica. I wish to thank the FFP team led by its Chairman, Mr. Andrew Mahfood for its sterling work post hurricane Sandy in ensuring that those who were left homeless had a roof over their heads as quickly as possible. Mr. Speaker, I feel compelled to comment and sound a warning regarding the recent controversy in Trelawny which brought the good name of Food for the Poor into question. Mr. Speaker, we have to be careful how we bring international charitable organizations into the political fray. Mr. Speaker, it has serious implications on their reputation and their ability to raise funds internationally. While there is always room for improvement in any system of distribution, I humbly suggest that with technology as advanced as it is today, surely we can work out a revised system of housing allocations where applications submitted by MPs and other applicants are submitted with photographs of the condition of the site/houses to be replaced and a State Agency be specifically assigned to do the verification prior to approval. Mr. Speaker, in this case it is important that we leave Food for the Poor and other agencies out of the politics which unfortunately, some in society continue to play. I am happy that Food for the Poor was vindicated in this recent unfortunate public controversy and want to publicly congratulate Food for the Poor for their tireless work in the Sandy Relief and by extension, the tremendous work that they have been doing for many years in Jamaica and other countries around the world which I am sure they will continue to do, saving Governments around the world from having to spend scarce resources in these harsh economic times.

Mechanisms and Protocol for future assistance disasters, which is not IF but WHEN

Mr. Speaker, we are fast approaching the new hurricane season. No doubt, the national Disaster Committee will soon commence its meetings. Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, despite the major devastation caused by hurricane Sandy, we did not receive the usual international aid, financial or otherwise, as in previous decades. The collaboration of Government with NGOs such as Food for the Poor locally however allowed the country to recover quickly.

This proves that if international aid is forthcoming, there can be a quicker response and much more can be achieved in the rebuilding of housing resulting in less persons being in need of help. There will also be less likelihood for the need to declare an area a “disaster area”.

Constituency Development Fund

Mr. Speaker despite serving as an Opposition MP this term, I continue to work tirelessly towards the upliftment of the people and development of the Parish and continue to work through the lobbying of scarce funds through the various Ministries and Agencies of Government. This has been made somewhat easier due to the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) from which I have allocated funds to projects which makes it easier to get approval from the State Agencies.

Mr. Speaker, I have always been a stout defender of the CDF despite various criticisms of the Fund in various quarters.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to once again state in Parliament for the Hansard that the CDF - and not because it was implemented under the previous JLP Government - is one of the best programmes for implementation by MPs in our 50 years of Independence. It has changed MPs from being politically impotent to having vim and vigour. Yet the naysayers and the misguided say it is “pork barrel” but I say to them that this well intentioned Fund has the necessary systems and checks and balances to uncover any misuse. So far in its six years of existence, questions have been raised but the misuse has been few and far between and they have been raised and adequately and appropriately addressed. I say to all here “long live the CDF”.

My six years of funding such programmes are there for all to scrutinize by any entity or member of the public. I can assure you that the findings will show vast benefits to the improvement of the lives of the people of the constituency of West Portland.

Mr. Speaker, West Portland CDF Funds were spent embarking on projects in the following areas between 2008 to the end of the 2012 financial year.

1. **WATER** - **The rehabilitation and development of at least eleven (11) water supplies.** Most of these are owned and operated by the Portland Parish Council. These were completed at a cost of Thirty Six Million Twenty Five Thousand Four Hundred and Eighty Six Dollars (\$36,025,486.00). These water supplies include Black Hill, Orange Bay, Mt. Pleasant and Shirley Castle.

2. **Road Rehabilitation** - Forty Two Million Seven Hundred and Fifty Thousand Five Hundred and Five Dollars (\$42,750,505.00) was spent on the rehabilitation of major roadways, farm and Parish Council roads, drain cleaning and erection. This impacted over fifteen communities including Kildaire, Shantamee, Forty Acres, Starapple Tree among others.

3. **Welfare & Housing** - Twelve Million Seven Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$12,700,000.00) was spent on assistance to thousands of persons with Welfare and Housing with an additional Three Million Three Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$3.3m) being used to assist families affected by various disasters.

4. **Educational Assistance / Technology** - Since 2008, I have spent approximately Twenty One Million Dollars (\$21m) to assist the most indigent families with the education of their children. Of this amount Seven Million Five Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$7.5 m) was taken from the Constituency Development Fund and the remaining Thirteen Million Five Hundred Thousand (\$13.5 m) through sponsorship from corporate Jamaica. These funds I have used to assist over six thousand (6,000) students with textbooks, uniforms and school equipment and others with small bursaries and grants especially those at the secondary and tertiary levels.

I have recognised the importance of access to computer facilities especially for students. I have also recognized that not all parents will be able to purchase a computer desktop or laptop for their children's education especially when other basic needs are competing for attention. I felt it my duty as Member of Parliament to ensure that whatever assistance I can provide to ensure affordable and easy access is implemented across the constituency.

It is for this reason that I have collaborated with the Universal Service Fund to create four computer facilities strategically placed in major development areas across the constituency. The Buff Bay, Hope Bay, St. Margaret's Bay and recently completed Fruitful Vale Computer and Resource Centres seek to:

- provide affordable access to the internet and online services,
- create a medium for viable recreational activities for the youth,
- Create an area acceptable and conducive for students to relax, learn and prepare for examinations,
- Encourage research through the use of the internet.

These projects were constructed at a cumulative cost of approximately Twenty Nine Million Dollars (\$29 m). These centres are poised to be of benefit to every student in the constituency given their strategic geographic location.

I am committed to ensuring that all schools in my constituency have access to computer facilities for administrative and the general teaching and learning experience. I have sourced and distributed at least one computer system to the approximately thirty (30) Primary, All Age and Junior High schools and to at least twenty five (25) Early Childhood Institutions in West Portland. To date, I have eleven (11) Early Childhood Institutions to equip with computers systems and these are being sourced for distribution.

I have also assisted thirty (30) students who have excelled at all levels with laptops and desktop computers.

I wish to thank Telecoms providers, LIME and Digicel for their support in making the advancement of technology in the constituency a reality.

5. **Economic Enablement** - Through the Rural Agricultural Development Agency (RADA) I have assisted hundreds of farmers to enhance their produce and expand their yield. I am particularly pleased at the number of women in my constituency who I have been able to assist who are attempting to provide for themselves and their families by way of poultry production. There are several others whom I am sure would love to benefit from this programme but registration with RADA continues to be a challenge.

6. **Rural Electrification-** In collaboration with the Rural Electrification Programme, at least seven (7) districts benefitted from electrification. Forty Acres, Chelsea, Maidstone and Fruitful Vale were all projects submitted through my CDF allocation. Cumulatively these projects are being implemented at a cost of Four Million Seven Hundred and Ninety Thousand Dollars (\$4,790,000.00). These projects are expected to provide electricity for hundreds of residents.

7. **Unemployment**

Like other rural Constituencies, West Portland is grappling with unemployment. I welcome the announcement of the Prime Minister in her recent Budget presentation, the setting up a Task Force to co-ordinate Rural Development Strategies which includes looking at the expansion of employment in rural areas. An urgent intervention is required to stem the economic hardships being experienced by many families.

Mr. Speaker, the lack of employment triggers many adverse situations in the home and society, some of which are domestic abuse, crime and illiteracy.

Mr. Speaker, Portland is much too beautiful to remain untapped and for its people to suffer at the hands of lack of opportunity.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

INFRASTRUCTURE

JDIP

The Jamaica Development Infrastructure Programme (JDIP) has assisted in the transformation of thousands of lives in West Portland. Through JDIP, main roads which had almost deteriorated to dirt tracks because of under-development were rehabilitated and have made travelling more time efficient for residents and motorists. JDIP was also the source of major short term employment which boosted economic activity in all areas in which major road rehabilitations were undertaken.

Noteworthy is the transformation of the Hope Bay to Coopers Hill road which has reconnected the west with the east via Fellowship. The Hope Bay to Coopers Hill JDIP Road rehabilitation project facilitated the repair of major breakaways and the reopening of roads to vehicular traffic. This project was completed at a cost of approximately Three Hundred and Twenty Eight Million Five Hundred and Fifty Six Thousand One Hundred and Eighty Nine Dollars (\$328,556,189.00).

Other major JDIP works include the resurfacing of the West End, Mt. Pleasant road done at a cost of Twenty Two Million Three Hundred and Fifty Seven Thousand Two Hundred and Fifty One Dollars (\$22,357,251.00). The Silver Hill road was also rehabilitated at a cost of Forty Two Million Fifty Four Thousand Seven Hundred and Three Dollars (\$42,054,703.00). The Swift River (Bloomfield) road and the Friendship roads were also rehabilitated.

BRIDGES

Rio Grande Bridge

The Rio Grande Bridge is a very important piece of infrastructure that is needed to improve the traffic flow and security of motorists and pedestrians

traversing the roadway. The Railway bridge that existed was a security hazard, proving dangerous for all the persons who had to use it.

The Rio Grande Bridge which was started in October 2010, was subsequently completed in July 2012 and acts as that significant piece of infrastructure smack on the border of East and West Portland. With the advent of the completion of the Port Antonio to Ocho Rios leg of the highway and the completion of this bridge, it now opens up the Parish of Portland to easy access and infrastructural development.

This project was completed at a cost of approximately Twenty Eight Million Three Hundred Thousand US Dollars (USD\$28.3m).

This project has done well for the community even before its completion. It has boosted the economic activities within the Parish. It has provided approximately two hundred and forty (240) jobs for skilled and unskilled residents. Inclusive in this number are persons who were exposed to new skill areas and trained on the job.

China Harbour has done well in contributing to the development of the community in which they have worked. China Harbour must be commended for their corporate sponsorship. They have contributed to the expansion of the St. Margaret's Bay Basic School and Sanitary Convenience and the Hope Bay and St. Margaret's Bay Computer Labs as well as fencing of the Hope Bay All Age School. China Harbour also contributed to the repair of minor roads such as New Road.

Craig Mill Bridge

The Craig Mill Bridge which connects the Belvedere, White River, Silverstock and Craig Mill communities fell into a state of disrepair. After lobbying long and hard for the construction of this bridge, the JEEP Secretariat approved an estimate submitted for approximately Twenty Seven Million Dollars (\$27 m). Work is currently underway to replace the existing structure. This piece of infrastructure is very critical to the development agenda of the community, constituency and Parish.

JSIF - Shrewsbury Multi- Purpose Complex

The Jamaica Social Investment Fund (JSIF) has been a great source of support. They have collaborated with the Sports Development Fund (SDF)

and the CHASE Fund to erect a state-of-the-art Multi-purpose Complex in the Fruitful Vale community. This project which is at its closing stage will be completed at a cumulative value of approximately Twenty Five Million Dollars (\$25 m). It is equipped with a hard court, a mini stand, playfield and a beautifully constructed community building. It was developed to benefit approximately thirteen (13) districts between Hope Bay and Coopers Hill and further in the Swift River valley.

Water Supply Schemes

JSIF - Extension - Fruitful Vale Water Supply

JSIF has approved approximately Forty Five Million Dollars (\$45 m) for the expansion of the Fruitful Vale Water Supply. This project is at its final stages of implementation and is expected to provide potable water to the entire Fruitful Vale community.

Communities that were not added based on Rural Water Authority repairs since 2009 will be catered to in this JSIF funded project. These communities include Industry to Content and Dumphries to Coopers Hill.

Wharf Lane Water Supply

The Wharf Lane Water Supply project was recently completed in collaboration with the Rural Water Authority Limited. This project was completed at a total cost of approximately Twelve Million Dollars (\$12 m) to which I have contributed Three Million Eight Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$3.8 m) from my CDF allocation. This project joins with the Orange Bay Water Supply which is to be upgraded in this financial year and the Black Hill Water Supply which is currently being worked on to provide potable water to all residents from Buff Bay to Hope Bay and all the districts off the main road within this area.

Shirley Castle Water Supply

The Shirley Castle Water Supply is also to be developed in the first quarter of this financial year at a cost of approximately Five Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$500,000.00).

K Factor

Bangor Ridge-

Mt. Pleasant-

Initial works were completed on the Mt. Pleasant Water Supply. These were completed at a cost of approximately Four Million Two Hundred & Sixty Thousand Dollars (\$4.26 m).

A revised estimate was recently submitted to ensure that all the districts in the Mt. Pleasant community have access to potable water. The Ministry of Water, Land, Environment & Climate Change (K-Factor Team) is at an advanced stage of technical assessment and are currently awaiting an approval for the implementation of this project.

Red Tape to Red Carpet

Mr. Speaker, there is broad consensus that bureaucracy is a major impediment to doing business, attracting investment, creating jobs and achieving growth. I therefore wish to now spend some time on the matter of bureaucracy as if we are to grow Jamaica out of its problems going forward we have to turn **red tape into red carpet**.

If we are to become “the place of choice to live, work, raise our families and do business”, then bureaucratic transformation and gradual elimination must be aggressively pursued.

Mr. Speaker, this can only be done properly and effectively by the continued overhauling of the public sector which is strangled by inefficiency and archaic legislations and regulations which have no place in a globalized economic environment and have driven a mentality of finding every reason why things can't be done rather than making it our job to facilitate getting things done.

Some of the red tape is generic to all government entities. These can be identified and broadly eliminated or streamlined. Others are peculiar to particular entities and will have to be dealt with entity by entity. It may not be possible to tackle all at one time. What is both necessary and doable is

to determine the mission, galvanize the resolve and the political will, identify those entities that are most critical to investment and national development and get going. Others can be brought on board as the mission proceeds.

When the Public Sector Transformation Unit (PSTU) was established, its mandate was two-fold:

- (1) to develop a master plan for the rationalization and restructuring of Government Ministries and Agencies to eliminate waste and reduce cost;
- (2) to review the administrative procedures and transactional processes of Government to make Government operations and the public's experience in doing business with Government simple and friendly.

The first part of the mandate was completed and presented to Parliament two years ago. The second part is the work that remains to be done. One area that needs rationalization and restructuring so as to reduce waste and cost and make the public's experience in doing business with Government simple and friendly is the Development Applications Approval Process (DAAP).

The rationalization and restructuring of the DAAP could lead to increased employment and growth of the economy in the short to long term given the positive correlation between building starts and Gross Domestic Product. At present the process is beset by too much red tape, is too complex, unwieldy and a major disincentive to investment, business and job creation. In addition, Mr. Speaker, several of the major stakeholders in the system including land use planners, architects, land surveyors, developers and even some of those who work in the system have criticised it as being inefficient and costly in terms of the time and process applications have to undergo before a decision is taken on them.

Mr. Speaker, as to the direct and indirect costs of the red tape to the economy, I am proposing that the Minister of Finance should commission a study to ascertain the true cost.

Mr. Speaker, I will now give a few examples of issues that are choking the development applications approval process:

1. **The lack of an up-to-date National Spatial Plan and Development Orders or Plans**

At present the national spatial plan and the development orders for Jamaica are dated with the last national spatial plan being for the period 1978-1998 and development orders being as old as that for Kingston which was confirmed in 1966. These plans and orders are important as they ensure a level of transparency, accountability and predictability in the system and allows for co-ordinated investment decisions by both the private and public sector.

2. **The application processing system**

As mentioned before this process is circuitous, lengthy, costly, time consuming and very frustrating for all those involved. In addition, the various legislations do not provide authority, and in some cases, mandates for the circulation and comments from various Agencies or Departments of Government. Mr. Speaker, by my experience the comments can take upwards of three to six months to obtain. Then there are also the overlapping arrangements of obtaining planning and building along with the necessary environmental permits from the local planning and building authorities and the National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA). This process, Mr. Speaker, adds months to the process especially when several of the local authorities are involved.

3. **The POST APPROVAL inspection process**

Mr. Speaker, after approval of a development application in most, if not in all cases, site inspections have to be carried out at the various stages of the development / construction process by several of the entities involved in the approval process. The process often times involves the developer informing the relevant Government Agency at the stage where the development / construction has reached and an agreement arrived at for the date of inspection. Often times these dates are not honoured by the Government entity which adds more cost to the project.

4. **The appeal process**

Mr. Speaker, this process which gives an applicant the right to appeal the decision on an application that has been refused or a condition of approval he or she disagrees with, can at times be very lengthy. These appeals in most cases are made directly or indirectly to the Minister in charge of Planning and the Environment. It is my understanding that this process can even be lengthier than the application process itself and in many cases can take several years. There is one case of a large development Mr. Speaker which I am aware at present is languishing as although the Minister has granted the appeal, the Local Authority is holding up the issuing of Conditions. **Mr. Speaker, let us move Jamaica from red tape to red carpet.**

5. Another example, Mr. Speaker is the fear expressed by the local planning authorities/ Parish Councils or other Government entities of losing revenue from the payment of fees they collect or control over the system. Mr. Speaker, this is an important issue and important safeguards must be developed to protect and preserve the revenue flows to the Councils and other Government entities and also ensure that their technical input is obtained. But Mr. Speaker, this cannot mean delaying the approval process because we cannot find the will to put mechanisms in place for doing so.

Overalling the System with the Jamaica Emergency Development Applications Approval Process (JEDAAP)

Mr. Speaker, while the processes have started and continue at a very slow pace, we still have a few years of overalling which Jamaica does not have the luxury of that time. It is with this in mind that I make a radical but necessary proposal to the Prime Minister and her Cabinet for the interim systems of development approval which will no doubt get our economy moving which is a must if we are to start meeting the stringent targets of the IMF. We have to implement a two-pronged attack/ approach which is to have the overalling of the system continued within specific timelines.

This “out of the box” approach which I will call the Jamaica Emergency Development Applications Approval Process (JEDAAP) has several tenets which can move us from **red tape to carpet** which I will now outline.

The application processing system

This tenet involves the setting up of a Cabinet Committee similar to that of the Infrastructure Committee which will pull together the relevant Ministers and Agencies who have the development mandate as part of their portfolios. This should be chaired by the Prime Minister initially with Ministers Pickersgill, Phillips, Hylton, Arscott, Davies and McNeill who are the critical Ministers then other Ministers can be invited according to the particular investment agenda. An important element of this committee would be the Government Town Planner whose mandate it is to advise the Government on all land use matters. Where major mega projects are proposed one alternative is for the Government to obtain the necessary technical advice and use the parliamentary or another fast track process to take a decision on these projects.

This would require this Cabinet Committee to give clear instructions to their Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Agencies to carry out all development projects including at the Parish Council levels to be brought together for review at this Committee which I suggest meets a minimum of once per month at which time policy directions as well as decisions be given at that level in order to fast track well needed growth. This will require a Unit to be set up in no other place than the Office of the Prime Minister which will co-ordinate all the information and will monitor and track projects going forward.

The Development Assistance Centre (DAC)

Mr. Speaker, another plank of the DAAP is the use of the Development Assistance Centre (DAC) process to address projects not dealt with under the aforementioned process. You will remember that then Prime Minister Bruce Golding who also had responsibility for physical planning laid in this House Ministry Paper Number 22/10 which described the implementation of a pilot Development Assistance Centre (DAC) within NEPA. The DAC was conceived within a conceptual framework for the development of a “one stop shop” for processing applications. The proposal for the DAC was a public/private partnership between the Government, USAID and the JCC “Regs/Legs” project.

Mr. Speaker, we had a great degree of success working between the Office of the Prime Minister, the Department of Local Government, Cabinet Office

and with the Jamaica Chamber of Commerce, USAID and the major players involved with the DAAP. The DAC was established in 2010 and by my recollection was not only extremely successful but was seen as novel and appreciated by investors, developers and the professional groups.

The establishment of the DAC, Mr. Speaker, was to be followed by the establishment of a **two-tier approval process**. The two-tier system for applications (characterized by “large projects” – Tier 1 and “small projects”- Tier 2) was aimed at eliminating the circuitous routing of applications by having the Authority to whom the application is submitted be fully responsible and accountable for all aspects of the approval. This would have eliminated the need for applications being referred back and forth between NEPA and the Local Authorities – the Parish Councils. With the two tier process it is expected that most small developments including under 9 lot subdivisions, small additions and single family houses located in approved subdivisions will have a turn around time of only between 3- 14 days. **Mr. Speaker, let us move Jamaica from red tape to red carpet.**

Online Processing System

Mr. Speaker, if we are to continue to move in the direction of using technology to simplify processes, I am proposing that the Government set up an online development application submission process and also consider licencing private development firms to grant approval for certain types of developments. This system would also be complemented by a system where applicants can deem applications to have been approved if they do not hear from the Authority they have been submitted to within ninety (90) days.

Appeals

Mr. Speaker, where appeals are concerned, it is proposed that all outstanding appeals should be heard by the Minister of Development, subdivisions and otherwise, scheduled and decisions taken as some have been languishing for in excess of ten (10) years. This process would include setting a weekly schedule and giving the appellants advanced notice of such appeals in writing and also by a public notice in the newspaper. If the applicant does not respond, the appeal will be heard in their absence. This is not a perfect system for approvals but is what is required as serious times require immediate and serious action.

The process may also include the strengthening of the relevant Division in the Ministry of Water, Land, Environment & Climate Change to address appeals along with the creation of relevant planning and development policies.

The POST APPROVAL inspection process

Mr. Speaker, I am suggesting that this entire process be privatised as there are many highly qualified individuals and companies who could undertake this. We are sure that with adequate safeguards of accountability in place that this system can be successful.

National Spatial Plan and Development Order / Plan making Process

Mr. Speaker, the Government should as a priority establish a consortium of local professionals comprising planners, architects, land surveyors, economists, sociologists and the various universities amongst others led by NEPA and the Ministry of Water, Land, Environment & Climate Change to complete this plan. It is expected that technical support would be provided by other Government Agencies and Ministries. It is my recommendation in that in the interim between the drafting and promulgation of these plans/orders that the Minister issue development guidelines such as those relating to green development, climate change response and height and density for all the major urban centres.

Mr. Speaker, there is no denying that there has been progress made and credit must be given to the various Agency Heads and civil servants but we still have a lot of work to be done in both changing the mindset and the various outdated pieces of legislation which must be on the legislative priority agenda. It therefore must be the main objective of facilitating investment hence my call to action. **Mr. Speaker, let us move Jamaica from red tape to red carpet.**

WORTHY PARK

Mr. Speaker, there is an existing situation which I would like to highlight as an example of how Government must **not** work. Mr. Speaker, there is a lease by Government to Worthy Park Estate Ltd. at Caymanas. The lease has been on a year to year basis as this prime agricultural sugar land is part of the lands earmarked by Factories Corporation of Jamaica for the development of the Logistics Centre. Mr. Speaker, Worthy Park currently employs two hundred (200) persons and earns US Two Million Six Hundred Thousand Dollars (US\$2.6 million) of foreign exchange from producing

3,000 tonnes of sugar annually. Mr. Speaker, they have been given notice four times so far -

June 13, 2011;

July 26, 2011;

September 18, 2012

and as recent as April 23, 2013.

Had they vacated the land, the country would have lost over Five Million Dollars (US\$5 m) of foreign exchange earnings and two hundred (200) persons would have been out of a job from 2011 and not one single block would have been laid to date.

Mr. Speaker, this issue transcends both Governments and I can recall when this matter came to the former Prime Minister's attention, the explicit instructions to the UDC then, that when all was in place for the Logistics Centre and the laying of block and steel was ready to be effected, that he would personally drive the bulldozer to clear the site. Since he is no longer in Parliament, I am making the offer today to be the driver of the bulldozer and I am making a national appeal to the powers that be:

1. not to interfere with the employment of two hundred (200) people and the earnings of millions of dollars of well needed foreign exchange until such time as this Logistics Centre becomes truly a reality; and
2. for the Government to instead look at the possibility of the other six hundred (600) acres of idle land with the possibility of making a change in the location of the Logistics Centre as up until now we still have not been able to get final details from the Minister in relation to the hard information for time lines for this dream to become a reality. Mr. Speaker, this is just one of so many irrational decisions that are taken which impact negatively on productivity. I do hope that the Prime Minister and the Ministries of Agriculture and Industry, Investment and Commerce will look into this matter and give the necessary instructions as recommended by me.

On one hand, Mr. Speaker, the Government has created JEEP to produce well needed temporary jobs and on the other hand by the stroke of a pen, they take away well needed permanent jobs, affecting thousands of beneficiaries prematurely and unnecessarily.

Mr. Speaker, let us be serious about moving Jamaica from bureaucratic red tape to red carpet.

General Remarks - Telecommunications / ICT

Mr. Speaker, I would firstly like to thank Minister Paulwell for adjusting his travel arrangements in order to be present here for my contribution. Mr. Speaker, this shows the mutual respect we have for each other now as we did when the tables were different when I was Minister. We continue to be in constant dialogue and seek always to have consensus as best as possible on portfolio responsibilities as this always serves the country best.

Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the Minister of State & Member from South East St. Andrew yesterday and must congratulate him on a well researched and prepared presentation. It also makes it very easy for me to endorse all of what he said as much of what he spoke about was formulated and promulgated during the previous Administration under my Ministerial watch. Some of what he spoke about went as far back as the previous administration to mine under Minister Paulwell. It is not necessary to get into details or grandstanding as to who did what and I only wish him the best of luck in meeting the time lines that have been set.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS/ICT

Mr. Speaker, the Telecommunications landscape has seen several significant developments over the last two years. Two of the most significant were the fact that Claro was acquired by Digicel and exited the market in 2011; and in May 2012, amendments were passed to the Telecommunications Act.

Admittedly it has taken some time to amend the statute. However, in this month, May, we will celebrate the one year anniversary of its passage. As we are all aware, the passage of legislation does not by itself ensure that prices will reduce and competition will increase in a market and therefore it is the task of the regulators to use their statutory powers in a timely manner to bring the desired objective of promoting fair and open competition.

I will highlight some of the amendments:

1) Transparency / Availability of Information

In this regards, the OUR was given expanded powers to request information from telecommunications operators. This is important for competition, as not only is the OUR better positioned to carry out its function, but this will expand the information available to customers as they make choices for their telecommunications spend.

2) Convergence

The statute has now moved from being voice-centric focus, having recognized that telecommunications is more than voice service. As a pertinent example, having received tablets, members of the House are able to use mobile data services to access emails, review legislation, and conduct video conferencing. What we knew as telecoms 2 years ago is only a subset of telecoms today. We are in a different phase of technology, and regulations must therefore be crafted to be technology and network neutral.

3) Infrastructure Sharing

The statute empowers the OUR to set infrastructure sharing rules, however, I must say that I have not seen where the OUR has commenced the necessary consultation on infrastructure sharing rules. Across the island, the towers of competing providers are just feet apart in many locations. Why are we not taking the necessary steps to protect the environment and oblige tower sharing? I note too that two submarine cable operators have entered into a joint venture and this leads me to query what is being done with respect to submarine cable regulations.

4) Universal Service Fund

We see where there is an expansion of the remit of the Universal Service Fund (USF). The Minister announced that the USF has collected nearly Ten Billion Dollars (\$10 billion) from the Universal Service levy.

However, I need to ask Mr. Speaker, how is the USF monitored to ensure that the spend is in the most efficient and effective manner? I

have not seen a universal service policy and in my view, the Government's policy should be transparent and available to the citizenry.

5) Local Number Portability and Mobile Termination Rates (MTR)

Announcements have been made with respect to Local Number Portability. This will result in consumers owning their numbers and being able to switch networks and keep their numbers. Local Number Portability is expected to increase competition in the market for consumers although this does not again by itself force fair competition.

The OUR also needs to ensure that other regulations that are critical to the successful implementation of Number Portability are in place. These include: 1) Low termination rates and 2) Prohibitions on price discrimination in other words, regulation of retail rates. My understanding is that fixed retail rates have always been regulated and mobile rates were unregulated. Over the years the effect of this, is that charges to another network were excessive. Customers were, as it would appear, being punished for their network choice.

Regrettably, Mr. Speaker, the establishment of a regulated Mobile Termination Rate (MTR) has been a vexed issue among mobile telecoms providers. It is also a vexed issue among consumers who have had to pay vastly different charges depending on whether they are calling a subscriber on the same network or a different network. The variation in rates ranged from 84c per minute to as high as \$9.00 per minute. This is why my friend, the Minister of Agriculture had to be carrying two cell phones, one in each back pocket.

It took some time for the OUR to develop the regulatory protocols to be able to administer a Mobile Termination Rate and a major step forward was taken last June when an interim rate of \$5.00 per minute was introduced. The final determination is expected on May 30th. I am forced to query the length of time it has taken for the publication of final termination rates and it is now imperative that this commitment be delivered on.

Mr. Speaker, the Opposition expects this Administration to follow through from where we left off when the then JLP Administration began the process of cutting cross-network rates in order to ease the burden on consumers while encouraging competition in Jamaica's mobile market.

Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, it would be useful if the Minister of Transport, Works & Housing, in closing the debate, could, on behalf of the Minister of Science, Technology, Energy & Mining, make a definitive statement on the timeframe for the introduction of the new Mobile Termination Rate. Or, better still, I would be quite happy to yield if the Minister himself is prepared to provide that statement now.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that an issue of concern is the possibility that MTR may lead to a reduction in revenues to government. Any such possibility will be mitigated by the fact that lower charges will lead to more calls being made and for longer duration. [*Plus, the government has the capacity to make appropriate adjustment in the tax structure to recoup any shortfall that could arise while keeping the playing field level.*]

Mr. Speaker, I reiterate that in such a dynamic market, we cannot afford these decisions to take almost one year. Companies are releasing tablets and phones every few months and it takes one year for the regulator to set final mobile termination rates - rates that will eventually affect the prices paid for the very services on the tablets and smartphones.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased however that both the Government and Opposition are at one that the playing field should be levelled as much as possible and that providers should compete more on the quality of service than on access to their own network over which they have control.

If we are therefore to benefit from the amendments to the Telecommunications Act which expands the regulator's powers, the regulator must also act with speed and efficiency.

The Minister announced a few weeks ago a spectrum auction of the 700Mhz band with a bid period which would run to June 22nd and a reserve price of in excess of US Forty Million Dollars (US\$40million). The 700 MHz spectrum auction process commenced in April, however, we were advised that the auction has been postponed indefinitely. Is it that the reserve price tag is out of the reach of an existing operator and not attractive enough for a new entrant?

The issue with such an auction with high reserve price as the one proposed is that not only is the market mature and market penetration over 100%, but at such a high cost for the spectrum and the rollout costs the operators will be forced to charge higher rates for mobile broadband to recoup spend. Mr. Speaker, it is important to address matters alluded to earlier such as number portability, infrastructure sharing and mobile termination rates before we can actually get maximum value from licences. Mr. Speaker, we cannot afford for the price tag to be a deterrent to investors. The question is “Are we putting the cart before the horse merely for the sake of grand announcements?”

Has the Minister and the Spectrum Management Authority (SMA) considered alternatives to an auction? What about a reduction in the reserve price? We must face that it cannot just be about a one-off payment. It is about sustainable investment in the country. It is about reasonably priced telecommunications services with an ability to compete. It is about operators having access to adequate appropriate spectrum to innovate and provide cutting edge service. Mr. Speaker, it is impossible to ask for a maximum reserve price without properly doing our homework and therefore if we rush to the market, Mr. Speaker, then we can only do so at a reduced price or ... perhaps it is better to simply wait.

Mr. Speaker, the Opposition is of the opinion and recommends that it is best that the Government should not sell this national asset now until data penetration on existing technology is much higher and there is actually a demand for greater data services which cannot be provided by old technology. Selling this licence now, Mr. Speaker, will only give a windfall to the early buyer, and not necessarily the best buyer, who is willing to hold this licence.

The existing Regulatory approach as regards spectrum is one of command and control. This approach stifles technical and service innovation, but

lacks incentives for efficient use of the resource and creates barriers to voluntary and involuntary sharing.

We need to be moving in Jamaica towards Management and Licensing of the Resource with an approach that provides for Flexibility of use, and Spectrum trading such as countries like Australia, Guatemala, and New Zealand and in parts of the U.S.

Moreover, there must be consistent monitoring of spectrum use - use it or lose it. I expect that the SMA will also be reviewing the current spectrum allocation. It is well known that spectrum allocated to an operator has a direct effect on costs. As where for instance there is an inadequate spectrum cost increase, coverage reduces and quality of services is affected.

To foster a truly competitive market much work is left to be done and the regulators will themselves now need to act in a timely manner and to adapt to the ever changing world of telecommunications.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Speaker, this Honourable House has seen strident walk-outs and boycotts. We have exchanged verbal jabs and harsh words across the benches, but I believe we have done so in friendly rivalry. Mr. Speaker, it would therefore be remiss of me if I did not make special mention of the refreshing infusion of first time MPs in the Parliament. This mixture of youth and experience has brought a new level of vibrancy and cordial relationships which can only benefit the country going forward. I myself have made some new political friendships on both sides and often share in discussions of a common vision for our country. This, Mr. Speaker, augurs well for the generations coming up and those looking on. Let us therefore continue in the same spirit to confront the issues and challenges and not each other.

I, Madam Prime Minister, must once again state for Hansard to record that I Daryl Wesley Phillip Vaz stand ready and will continue to put patriotism

above politics. I stand ready to offer whatever limited experience, assistance or advice as a citizen of this beloved country and pledge to play my part as a legislator in moving this country ahead to achieve and realise its full potential as the great nation it can be.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day we will be judged on our individual performances as political representatives, whether it is at the polls or otherwise, but collectively, our legacy as legislators must speak for itself.

Last year Jamaica celebrated its 50th anniversary of Independence, a proud and momentous occasion for any nation. As a people, we were called to be “on a Mission”.

Mr. Speaker as I close my presentation, my rallying call to my colleagues is for that “Mission” to be for Jamaica and our fellow Jamaicans:

- Equal rights and justice for the poor and disadvantaged;
- Freedom and protection for our citizens in their communities;
- Positive action towards the transformation of lives; not empty rhetoric and broken promises;
- Financial growth, progress and prosperity; not another financial meltdown;
- Patriotism above partisan politics;
- One Jamaica that is unequalled in peace, love and unity.

I pray that God will give us all the vision to lead, lest we perish!

May God bless Jamaica, land we love!