

CONTRIBUTION TO 2009/2010

SECTORAL DEBATE

**Hon Daryl Vaz, Minister without
Portfolio, Office of the Prime Minister**

Confronting our Challenges,

Securing our Future:

Connected and Communicating

July 22, 2009

“.....You will recall that over the last twenty two (22) months I was the subject of a court case regarding my legitimacy in the House. I stand here proud today to say that I am one hundred percent Jamaican. I have returned to this Honourable House, bigger and better than before. For this, I pay special tribute to the people of West Portland. My presence here is testimony to the fact that democracy and justice are alive and well in Jamaica.....”.

“.....As we invest in the physical assets, we must also continue to build our knowledge assets. This Government fully recognizes the extraordinary capacity of innovation and technology generally, and more particularly, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to expand knowledge, drive growth, improve living standards and empower our people. ICT can and must play a critical role in facilitating our recovery and in improving and sustaining our competitiveness in the global environment.....”.

“.....Mr. Speaker, Wireless is Where Technology Meets Opportunity! In a modern society, citizens need to have access! We have been talking about access to services, to government, for entertainment, educational opportunities and postal services to single out just a few areas. Much of this is to be satisfied by access to broadband and media combined. The existing technological environment largely contemplates the physical connection between a device such as the computer and fibre and Mr Speaker, islandwide access to Cable is widely available.....”

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Introduction

Mr. Speaker and Members of this Honourable House, It is indeed a pleasure to be standing here once again and to be privileged to be a part of the 2009/2010 Sectoral Debate.

You will recall that over the last twenty two (22) months I was the subject of a court case regarding my legitimacy in the House. I stand here proud today to say that I am one hundred percent Jamaican. I have returned to this Honourable House, bigger and better than before. For this, I pay special tribute to the people of West Portland. My presence here is testimony to the fact that democracy and justice are alive and well in Jamaica.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have with me here today my entire family minus my mom. It is not because her citizenship caused me so many problems why she is not here but rather that she lives in Vancouver; and no, Vancouver in Canada not in the USA. I know, however, that if circumstances permitted she would have been here for my first presentation to the Sectoral Debate as a Cabinet Minister.

Mr. Speaker here with me today is my father, former Member of Parliament and Cabinet Minister, Douglas Vaz, my brothers Ricky and Wayne, my loving and supportive wife Ann Marie, and five children - Amanda, Adam, Chris, Gabriel and my youngest Victoria. To you I say thanks for lending me to the people of Jamaica, at the great sacrifice of my time and presence with you

and to assure you that I continue to work to make Jamaica a better place for us all.

Mr. Speaker, I must also thank my Prime Minister and Leader for allowing me the opportunity to serve as part of the Party and Government that he leads; starting in 2007, as Minister of State and being promoted three months ago to full Cabinet Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister with oversight for the Information and Telecommunications portfolio while maintaining my responsibilities for Special Projects.

Prime Minister, in 2007 when I was being sworn in, I promised to seize the opportunity by working hard and making you proud. I know I did that at the polls, and I continue to work tirelessly as a member of your Government during these most difficult times in Jamaica's history. I often say to myself when I lay in bed, unable to sleep, worrying about Jamaica and the world, that we are blessed to have you at the helm at a time like this. It is God's doing; He knows best.

To my colleague Members of Parliament and Ministers, it continues to be a pleasure working with you for the betterment of the lives of the people of Jamaica.

Mr. Speaker, I must also recognize the members of my personal and administrative staff and my team that provides support in the constituency. Without you all I would not be here today. Thank you for your continued dedication and commitment.

I acknowledge the Permanent Secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister, the Cabinet Secretary and their respective staff and thank them for all their assistance in the execution of my duties.

To the Information and Telecommunications Department headed by the Director General, your technical advice and tireless commitment to get the job done are highly appreciated.

My thanks to the Planning and Development team and its Chief Technical Director for their tremendous support with my Special Projects.

Of course, each Agency and their respective Boards have discharged their mandates in a manner that is a tribute to the overall performance of the Ministry.

To my extended family, the people of West Portland - You know, Mr. Speaker, it was promised some time ago by the Opposition that they would be this government's greatest nightmare, but I have to tell you that West Portland has turned out to be theirs. Let me once again take this opportunity to thank the people of West Portland for their resounding and record breaking mandate that returned me as Member of Parliament.

The West Portland bi-election victory gave me three records:

1. Most votes ever cast for a candidate in any election in this Constituency (7,927 and previously, 6,977 on September 3, 2007 which was also my victory);

2. Highest turn out of voters in any bi-election in West Portland (72.9% with the previous record of 72.8% being mine on September 3, 2007); and
3. The biggest margin of victory by any candidate in the history of West Portland (2,294 – the highest margin for any candidate in any Parliamentary election contested in West Portland from 1944).

Mr. Speaker, as I said during the recent by-election campaign having been stripped of my status as Member of Parliament, that to me, “MP” beside my name does not necessarily stand for Member of Parliament but for **Mr. Portland**. I am committed to lead the way and shape the vision for the most beautiful parish and most industrious people who have been neglected, for far too long.

Mr. Speaker, my work load has increased but let me assure my constituents that they remain my number one priority and even if they do not see me as much as they would like, I continue to work for their upliftment. Unlike some who may get caught in the trappings of being a Minister, I know that I can only continue to be one if I work hard and serve the people well.

The secret for this level of political success, Mr Speaker is very simple. Work for the people and they will work for you. Serve the people well and they will respond to you. That is why, I have invited here today, former Member of Parliament St. Clair Shirley and Mrs. Gloria Lynch, widow of the former Member of Parliament, the late great Leopold Augustus Lynch. These two former Parliamentarians, my mentors, were dedicated servants to the

people of West Portland, who have left an indelible mark in this Constituency and in whose footsteps I will continue to try and walk.

Work in the Constituency

Mr. Speaker I am unable to speak in detail about my work programmes in West Portland as we would be here for a few days well. However, I must indicate that my focus continues to be the rebuilding of the infrastructure, such as roads and water and assisting constituents through various social and welfare programmes.

One such major work programme has been the reopening of the Buff Bay Valley which has been impassable due to four complete breakaways which started as far back as 2004. Work continues, and whereas the government has been able to fund \$300 Million so far, it is estimated that a further \$300 Million will be needed to complete repairs in order to reopen the roadways over the next twelve to eighteen months.

Mr. Speaker, I remember not long ago the rigorous debate about a proposed fuel cess and the potential impact the announcement would likely have caused. I was one of the first to support the proposal, as I recognized that a percentage would go directly into road maintenance and repairs. The Ministry of Finance and the Public Service indicated then, that in the first year, 20 % of the fuel cess would be assigned to the Road Maintenance Fund; 35% in the second year and 50% annually hereafter.

Mr Speaker, I am expecting to access resources from the Fund to repair road infrastructure in the parish of Portland. I have had meetings with the Honourable Minister of Transport and Works and the Chief Executive Officer of the National Works Agency and have highlighted the priority roads and the estimates for repairs, not only in West Portland, but more broadly in the parish of Portland.

In East Portland - Comfort Castle breakaway, popularly known as Friday, repairs will cost approximately \$175 Million. In my own Constituency, West Portland:

- Chepstew to Petershill - \$40 Million
- Hope Bay to Coopers Hill – \$180 Million
- Petershill to Clifton Hill – \$34 Million
- Shirley Castle to Petershill – \$42 Million.

These are all heavy farming communities in Portland where roads are in a deplorable condition and where there is always a threat of disaster, similar to that of the Buff Bay Valley.

Mr. Speaker, our entire road network has deteriorated significantly and the collateral damage to property and the negative impact on livelihoods are too important to ignore. It is estimated that the cost to rehabilitate, upgrade and maintain our roads, bridges and drainage infrastructure in Jamaica today as I speak, is between \$40 - \$50 Billion dollars. A small problem can, with one good shower of rain, escalate to a costly disaster. So Mr. Speaker, this estimate increases daily due to the lack of the funding required to tackle this problem with the urgency it deserves.

Mr. Speaker we all understand that the global financial situation which has impacted our local economy has resulted in our inability to secure additional loans to undertake critical road work. It is for this reason, that I urge my colleagues in government to explore the option of external financing, and to give serious consideration to an arrangement that could allow access to low cost financing with a reasonable period for repayment and a two to three year moratorium on the principal payment. This would allow us to begin the rehabilitation and upgrade of our road infrastructure before it becomes unaffordable. Repayment on the facility could be guaranteed from the dedicated fuel cess.

As one who has experienced first hand the Buff Bay Valley breakaways, I know that the country cannot wait on the build up of the fuel cess to be able to undertake emergency repairs to the road infrastructure in Portland and other parishes. Mr. Speaker, we need to tackle the repairs with urgency.

Mr. Speaker, Jamaica continues to be challenged by crime and this demon is now raising its ugly head in Portland. Fifteen persons have been murdered in the parish since January 1 this year; three during the last week. This is very unusual. In 2008 a total of 11 murders were recorded. I have initiated discussions with the Police High Command to determine appropriate measures to effectively deal with the upsurge in crime and I have given my assurance to provide all the support that I can.

Mr. Speaker, despite these recent unfortunate developments, Portland continues to offer excellent development opportunities. However, we have not been immune to the economic setbacks and

many of the privately funded projects that I spoke about in my presentation last year have been put on hold. We, however, continue to be committed to the development of Portland.

Mr. Speaker, we have worked tirelessly to complete segment three of the North Coast Highway from Ocho Rios to Port Antonio which opens access to Portland. I am pleased to announce that the major works, including construction and rehabilitation of all bridges, were completed on June 30, 2009. As with any major road project, minor adjustments need to be made in a few areas to completely satisfy contract terms. Mr. Speaker, the official opening is scheduled for October 2009.

Discussions are far advanced to acquire funding under the Southern Coastal Highway Improvement Project for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the main coastal road from Port Antonio to Harbour View. This will be undertaken in two phases under segment one of the project: Port Antonio to Golden Grove (phase one) and Golden Grove to Harbour View (phase two). The design for the rehabilitation of the Port Antonio to Fair Prospect portion of the road is already completed and a significant amount of the land required to widen the road has been acquired. Mr. Speaker, construction is expected to commence in 2010.

Rehabilitation of the Port Antonio to Duckenfield main road will also be undertaken under the South Coast Project. Procurement of technical assistance for the feasibility and preliminary design is advanced and the related studies are scheduled to start by April 2010.

We continue to press ahead with plans for the Duckenfield Aerodrome as it is important that the parish of Portland be fully positioned to take advantage of post recession opportunities. Mr. Speaker, we expect to award the contract for the Environmental Impact Assessment shortly.

Mr. Speaker, Portland is well known for its heavy rainfall. Unfortunately, it is one of these parishes where the drainage and sewerage infrastructure require attention. The Port Antonio Water, Sewerage and Drainage Project, being financed by the European Investment Bank, the Government of Jamaica and the National Water Commission to the tune of US \$40 Million is nearing implementation stage. The intention is to improve the water supply to Port Antonio and adjoining areas and to establish sewerage and wastewater treatment facilities for the town and some areas just east of it. The project involves the rehabilitation of the water supply infrastructure for Port Antonio and adjoining areas; the installation of sewers for the town; the construction of trunk sewers and a new waste water treatment plant to treat the collected waste water; and the improvement of the drainage for the town. Mr. Speaker, construction works for the project will be done in two stages and designs for the major components have been completed. A contractor has been selected to carry out the Stage One works which should commence in late August 2009 and be completed by April 2011.

This investment in infrastructure opens up other economic opportunities. Mr. Speaker, we are examining the possibility of creating a Coffee Village as a unique attraction in the Buff Bay area of Portland. This will draw on the agro-tourism value of the

coffee industry fusing it with the rich resort experiences of Portland. The idea, Mr. Speaker, is to create cottage industries which will provide value-added products from coffee beans, and celebrate this world class Jamaican product through a range of coffee derivatives – from cosmetics to beverages, including pastry, drinks, liqueurs, condiments, even perfumes. There will be an annual Coffee Festival which will be promoted internationally, so people can come to Jamaica to experience fine Jamaican coffee in all possible forms. This will support small and medium sized hotels and guest houses, and truly bring tourism to the community of Buff Bay and its environs, putting it on the map as a destination, through agro-tourism.

Ministerial responsibilities

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to my Ministerial responsibilities.

These challenging times will come to an end and we must be ready to seize opportunities that will emerge. Earlier I mentioned a few of the projects that I am implementing in my own Constituency to upgrade and preserve the physical infrastructure and develop eco-tourism.

As we invest in the physical assets, we must also continue to build our knowledge assets. This Government fully recognizes the extraordinary capacity of innovation and technology generally, and more particularly, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to expand knowledge, drive growth, improve living standards and empower our people. ICT can and must play a critical role in

facilitating our recovery and in improving and sustaining our competitiveness in the global environment.

The government is fully aware that the challenge of the global economic downturn will not be solved by doing the same old things in the same old way. We must introduce new ideas and creative actions in which we as a people are all engaged. This course of action must and will include the combination of rapid development of a knowledge-based society; open governance and broad participation of the citizenry in national decision-making. In this regard, government is committed to the fullest use of ICT in order to improve service, cut waste, reduce crime, eliminate corruption, increase tax compliance, speed up public sector reform and create the framework for our citizens to have access to all the opportunities that are possible through application of ICT.

It has to be acknowledged Mr Speaker, that the placing of Information and Communications Technology within the portfolio of the Prime Minister is a strong signal that the Government regards ICT as a major element of the strategy for accelerated social and economic development. It is for this reason, that the government continues to pursue with greater purpose and determination, policy making, as well as, legislative and regulatory reform in the area of Information and Communications Technology

Mr Speaker, Jamaica has excelled in the telecoms arena. I need to remind this Honourable House that the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) 2009 ICT Development Index, ranked Jamaica at the top position in the Caribbean and number

four in the Latin America and Caribbean Region. The Global Information Technology Report 2008 - 2009 also places Jamaica in the number four position. The ITU and the United Nations World Information Society 2007 Report cite Jamaica as an example to the Caribbean in the development of its mobile telephony, noting that “Jamaica’s success is significant, as it disproved a long-established theory that small island economies were too small to sustain competition.”

ICT’s evolve at a rapid pace and to maintain a leadership position will require deliberate actions.

ICT Policy

Mr Speaker, in the near future I will bring to this Honourable House a new ICT policy that will speak to a regulatory framework that is appropriate for this fully liberalized environment and which should serve to bolster investor confidence and maintain Jamaica’s position as a regional leader.

The draft policy has already been the subject of extensive consultations and Mr Speaker, recognizing the importance of this policy to national development, I have invited the Members from East Kingston and Port Royal and SE St Ann to participate in the final review of the document.

Mr Speaker, I have tabled a number of Ministry Papers that could be considered a report card of the Agencies under my portfolio responsibility, and I urge my colleagues to read them carefully.

GoJ/IDB ICT Project

The GOJ/IDB Information and Communications Technology Project has been extended for one year to June 2010, to facilitate completion of the component related to the online tax payment system. Mr Speaker, it is important for us to collect and wisely spend every dollar of revenue that is due; and from every citizen who has an obligation to bear a fair share of the tax burden. In order to strengthen support for all fiscal agencies, the project upgraded the infrastructure of Fiscal Services Limited at a cost of more than US \$4-million; and it is money well spent. The project established a tax portal and we are seeing a steady increase in the use of this facility. In fact, just under \$1 billion was collected during the last fiscal year, representing an increase of nearly 30 per cent over the previous year.

This particular project has offered citizens an alternate method of paying property taxes and traffic fines. I must invite everyone to visit the website www.jamaicatax-online.gov.jm and experience the convenience of this provision.

Mr. Speaker, this government encourages the filing of tax returns. To facilitate this, Fiscal Services Limited, is now re-engineering the tax processes to finalize an e-filing application component that will allow online filing of tax returns. Under this programme the online submission of GCT/SCT returns became possible last year October. PAYE, NIS, HEART and Education Tax, as well as, Corporate and Personal Income Taxes will be implemented during the fiscal year 2009-2010.

Universal Access Fund

Let me now focus some attention on the Universal Access Fund (UAF). Mr Speaker some J\$5.5 Billion has been collected to date by the Fund. Of this amount, approximately J\$2.8 Billion has already been committed to the e-Learning project which I will address shortly.

To date the UAF has installed computer equipment in the 19 Branch Libraries across the country. Mr Speaker, specialized software for the hearing-impaired has been installed in these facilities. I am pleased to advise that students, researchers and others, who may be located long distances from the established libraries, will also be able to participate in the opportunities provided when the UAF completes its plan to build a state-of-the-art mobile cyber-library. This will be designed to use high speed internet connectivity, based primarily on wireless technology; and it will be fitted with modern multi-media equipment. The cost is projected to be \$12 million; and it will be money well spent in allowing the Library Service to visit communities throughout the island, to provide library and internet services that should stimulate our people to join the Knowledge-based movement.

Mr Speaker, our young people are excited by technology. Over at the National Library on East Street where the UAF has established connectivity, the system has come under severe pressure because demand for services from the community, is outstripping the capacity. Consideration is now being given to expanding these existing facilities, so as to improve the availability of internet services to the youth in the community.

The UAF has equipped access points in several communities; to include the School for the Deaf, Boys Town, Cassava Piece and Pembroke Hall.

The project to rollout the broadband network is now being reviewed to ensure sustainability and efficient implementation and that it satisfies the objective of providing access to the communities for which it was designed.

e-Learning Project

Mr Speaker, I turn now to the e-Learning Project. One hundred and sixty four high schools, five community colleges, six special schools and eight teachers' colleges have all been outfitted with audio-visual equipment and educational material on CDs and DVDs. Computers and networks have been fully installed in one hundred and forty three High Schools, three Special Schools and six Teachers' Colleges.

The project has trained just under 7000 teachers and lecturers. Of this number, over 2,200 are fully certified to use information and communication technologies. Work is also being done in conjunction with the University of the West Indies, as well as with the University of Technology and Mico University College which institutions have respectively formed alliances with the University of Plymouth and the University of British Columbia to deliver programmes designed to equip their graduates to effectively use ICT tools in teaching.

Mr. Speaker, the provision of computers and other hardware, while important, is only one part of the equation. A great deal of work is being done in the development and delivery of subject content to support the project. The Creative Production and Training Centre is producing 50 video lectures in the subjects that are being covered in the project using animation technology to demonstrate and illustrate challenging concepts.

In addition, Mr Speaker, instructional materials for teachers and students have been delivered to more than 150 schools. The subjects covered are English, Mathematics, Information Technology, Chemistry and Biology. Six additional subjects will be added shortly. For the subjects under the project, over 9000 test questions with model answers have been developed by specialist writers and deposited in a central repository which is available online.

Mr Speaker, Members may consult the Ministry Paper which I have tabled today for details on the schools in which they have interest.

I must advise the House that although the progress has been good, this project could have been completed if all the High Schools had the ideal conditions to accept and secure the equipment. Mr Speaker, the reality is, the schools that have not been equipped are unfortunately those most in need of this critical support. We will examine the original framework of this project to determine how best to deal with this matter.

Mr. Speaker, the projects that I have mentioned will help our people benefit from opportunities available online to access

Government services through websites, through employment exchange, through market information, by distance learning and by being able to conduct transactions on the internet.

The Postal Services

Under the Post Office Act of 1941, the Government is obliged to offer postal service to all citizens. In complying with this law, Government has used traditional approaches setting up over 600 postal points all over this country. Mr. Speaker, times have changed and we have to change the way we do things. Change presents opportunities for us to leverage technology, reduce costs and improve the efficiency with which we offer postal service. The future of the postal service goes beyond the delivery of mail and selling stamps and postal orders to non-traditional business which include the delivery of critical services closer to communities and perhaps “even stamps to your steps”. Mr Speaker, we are going to seize the opportunities and transform the way we deliver postal services by entering into public/private partnerships.

I recently received a plan designed to transform and modernise the postal service which will facilitate online access to Government. This plan will shortly be the subject of further review and wide consultation.

During this fiscal year, we will begin the process to modernize the 1941 Postal Services Act to provide for the delivery of services consistent with the technological age. Mr Speaker, I am sure all the Members of this Honourable House will take an interest in this exciting initiative.

Wireless

Mr. Speaker, Wireless is Where Technology Meets Opportunity!

In a modern society, citizens need to have access! We have been talking about access to services, to government, for entertainment, educational opportunities and postal services to single out just a few areas. Much of this is to be satisfied by access to broadband and media combined. The existing technological environment largely contemplates the physical connection between a device such as the computer and fibre and Mr Speaker, islandwide access to Cable is widely available. However, as the communication and information technologies evolve and become more widely accessible, the government is opening up new business opportunities by providing licences to allow service providers to roll out wireless-based services to Jamaicans. Mr Speaker, a wireless broadband license has been issued to Digicel and as a priority the government is offering two wireless cable licenses to afford a greater number of Consumers wider choices.

Mr Speaker, we are indeed in exciting times. As new wireless based services become more available there is a parallel revolution in the capabilities of “end-use” devices. The mobile phone has become the most phenomenally successful access device spanning all social and economic strata. The cell phone is fast becoming a single multimedia and telecommunications device. You can literally carry your business in your pocket. It allows you to access email and internet, converse, watch television and movies, engage

in video conferences, do video recordings and remotely monitor activities in your office or home.

The Government appreciates the need to build confidence around the use of mobile applications and provide the environment for Jamaicans to seize the opportunities that are emerging. Mr Speaker I mentioned earlier, that we will shortly present a new Information and Telecommunications (ICT) Policy. We will ensure that the framework allows service providers and regulators the platform on which to institute measures that enhance security and mitigate breaches.

Building a Knowledge Based Society

Access to Information

Mr Speaker, we are still to address the matter of the Access to Information regime and the Official Secrets Act. The Honourable House is reminded that there is a mandatory provision for review of the ATI Act and a major priority for the administration in this fiscal year is to complete the process so that we can strengthen its provisions.

Mr. Speaker, while the legislative work continues, the Access to Information Unit remains busy in assessing its operations to increase its effectiveness in serving its stakeholders. The ATI Unit is seeking to implement mechanisms to allow for real-time monitoring and tracking of requests made of public authorities. I

am happy to report that the ATI Unit has secured grant funding of US \$380,000 to support their efforts.

Content Standards

In February of this year, the Broadcasting Commission took decisive steps to improve the quality of content transmitted by Jamaica's electronic media through its "Directives" prohibiting the transmission of songs concerning the practice of open and violent sexual simulation and associated recordings ('dagging') and requiring licensees to refrain from transmitting songs which contain editing methods of bleeps and beeps. The Directives also contain prohibitions against transmitting lyrics promoting murder, acts of violence, glorifying the gun and presenting violent and sexually explicit lyrics in soca, hip hop and all other genres of music.

Mr Speaker, though the subject of extensive public debates, by and large, there has been strong public and industry support. We are beginning to see a noticeable improvement in the 'on-air' quality and improved internal systems of control within broadcasting institutions. These measures are to be followed up by amendments to the Regulations and the Act.

The Commission is to be commended, Mr Speaker, for introducing a citizen based media monitoring programme as a sequel to these Directives. We now have volunteers across the island helping to monitor television and radio output islandwide. The public response has been outstanding with participants from a wide

demographic, social and geographical spread. Mr Speaker, the process of regulating the standards of media output is on-going.

I must also say Mr Speaker that the concerns communicated to me with respect to the management of problematic material, is not limited to audio – there is engagement around content offered on cable, television, the cinema and other media. Let me thank the Cinematograph Authority for its service to the people of Jamaica and to articulate the government’s continued commitment, to align standards across the board and in the interest of the broader society.

Communications Systems and Institutional Arrangements

On this note, I must ask the Parliament to join with me in acknowledging the significant contribution the Creative Productions and Training Centre has made over the last twenty five years of their existence, to the preservation of culture and the documentation of our national heritage. Their CTV Channel along with that of the Public Broadcasting Corporation continues to offer material which presents, to particularly the younger generation, some of the rich music which the older ones of us probably took for granted and affords exposure to our proud history and achievements. Of course the PBCJ also has something to do with the fact that our constituents can see live how well their elected officials are representing their interest in this Honourable House.

Mr Speaker while we would like to speak to everyone face to face, and sometimes do, we have to make effective use of the media to

convey and receive the messages. Mr Speaker I would like to direct the attention of this Honourable House to the fact that government, through the Jamaica Information Service, explains its various policies, programmes, projects and activities. In addition, the Honourable Prime Minister has made himself available through, a monthly programme, **Jamaica House Live** which has facilitated dialogue across the Jamaican Diaspora. Persons can call toll-free, submit e-mails and written letters to ventilate burning issues of concern with the PM or make suggestions relative to solving problems. The Prime Minister keeps his appointment with you every month!

For those persons who prefer to see their government face to face you can meet with the PM and his team as they make their way around the island in the current series of **Town Hall meetings**. Mr. Speaker, details about our expanded interface using the press and other media is detailed in the Ministry papers tabled today. Our ultimate goal is to see that our communication infrastructure and use of the various platforms are efficiently and nimbly deployed.

Mr Speaker, I have also made myself available to stakeholders in the information and telecommunications industries. Within the first 90 days of assuming my new responsibilities, I met with a wide range of media professionals on a number of areas of concern to the fraternity and subsequently with the opposition spokesperson on the subjects. I am more than aware that there is a need to examine the modalities for regulating a converged environment and also for assessing the best use of government's communication assets. The matter of mergers or the

reconfiguration of the institutional arrangements as well as the possible creation of a single regulator may well be the outcome of the analysis underway both internally and independently. Where there is common ground Mr Speaker, is that wherever savings may be realized without sacrificing efficiency, or compromising the mandates of the respective institutions they will be pursued - from shared spaces and equipment to studios, and streamlining of common functions as appropriate.

Building Human Capacity

I have spoken to the fact that Jamaica is highly recognized in terms of ICT development and mentioned opportunities that telecommunications technologies offer. However, as technology evolves, if we are to establish Jamaica as the location of preference for ICT dependent businesses, we must engage in a process to continuously upgrade the human asset. Mr. Speaker, the State is already making significant investments in building the human capacity at all levels and through various initiatives and institutions such as the e-Learning Project; HEART Trust NTA; and at the tertiary level. Private institutions also offer ICT training.

We are building a culture of excellence in ICT skills to stimulate innovation and entrepreneurship on the way to building a critical mass to support this industry. We need our citizenry to be on top of the game.

With all the investments that have been made in training, it was a bit disappointing for me to learn recently that only 10% of the persons who register for the internationally recognised Cisco CCNA

programme, offered through several locally based partners, continue through to becoming certified. Certification is important because it signals a competence level and these are skills which are in demand globally. I am pleased to announce that Digicel has made a commitment to establish an internship programme that will, on an annual basis, provide practical experience for ten persons who complete the certification programme. Based on performance of the interns during this period, Digicel will go on to employ top performers. This initiative is an example of enlightened self interest, and I now challenge all other companies that could benefit from employing highly trained ICT professionals, to offer similar incentives to other participants who successfully complete the Cisco programme.

Mr. Speaker, I pause here to commend the Northern Caribbean University for their consistent high performance in the international Microsoft sponsored software competition. I believe the name of the team is itself an inspiration: The NCU Imagine Cup Team!

Open Source Software, Govnet and Other Cost Saving Initiatives

Another related area of focus, Mr. Speaker, is the completion of a project that is being implemented by the Central Information Technology Office (CITO) to introduce the use of Open Source Software. This project, funded under the GoJ/IDB ICT project which I mentioned earlier, should be completed and deployed for testing during this financial year. My view is that our framework should encourage a culture of innovation. It is my expectation that

a critical mass of 'out of the box' thinkers, combined with the inborn creative spirit of Jamaicans; freely available software; and enhanced ICT infrastructure, will give way to a collaborative environment for home grown software designers. Think of it – indigenous solutions for local problems and e-packages for Jamaican promise. From health to tourism; virtual tours of the body and of our island paradise - imagine and believe!

Mr Speaker, we must have a coordinated approach to guide ICT deployment across government and to facilitate seamless interface between government entities, as well as with citizens and business. It is on this premise that we are engaging the Planning Institute of Jamaica to craft a "Request For Proposal" for the development of 'Govnet'. What is Govnet? - Like beauty I'm told – you will know it when you see it. While this may be the starting point – it is understood that we must refine and articulate its scope far more precisely. Simply put, it is a platform for connectivity across government to allow for interactivity with the citizenry whom we serve. In other words 'e-government will be able to speak to e-citizen' in a coordinated and efficient manner. Mr Speaker, all of this in a secure environment and without wholesale retirement of investments already made in infrastructure. This generation will build a bridge over the 'Information Super Highway' connecting people, building lives, growing communities and developing country. My team has the charge to design a workable solution, drawing on best practices before the end of this financial year.

I will be engaging our telecommunications providers in the upcoming months to work with me to reduce the costs involved to the government in keeping pace with the rapid advances in the

telecommunications industry. It is my proposal that we should be able to connect with our citizens and *vice versa* utilizing modern and appropriate channels without the upfront capital costs. Mr Speaker, a change in paradigm to service-centred packages rather than equipment specific options is contemplated. This is my informal invitation to be excited by what is possible by way of a broader suite of choices, *inclusive of* mechanisms for monitoring our expenditure and the use of the system.

I will share a case that came to my attention a few days ago. One of the larger Ministries of Government commissioned a study of its telecommunications system and was surprised to realise that *without any capital outlay* a modern service could be provided for which the monthly payments would be significantly lower than it presently pays for the recurring costs for the existing system.

Mr Speaker, these initiatives are not happening in an unstructured way. The Honourable Prime Minister tabled the Vision 2030 Plan in this Honourable House in April of this year. I urge every Jamaican to familiarise themselves with this document. I want however to specifically focus your attention to the ICT component which is based on the National ICT Strategy developed by CITO. This Strategy is a blueprint for using ICT as an enabler for accelerated development across all Sectors.

Mr. Speaker, all the activities of the Information and Telecommunications Department, reflect the administration's commitment to forging a stronger link of understanding and cooperation between the Government and the people. By creating an effective legal, regulatory and infrastructural environment; by

being alert to the technological changes and the new frontiers emerging, the Government is confident that Jamaica can become more peaceful, more productive and more competitive. The challenge in this area is for united action between all sectors to make the best use of information and communications technologies to help speed up that day when we can better satisfy the people's yearning for an era of peace, progress and prosperity.

Admittedly Mr Speaker, I am uniquely positioned as the Minister with responsibilities for Special Projects to deal with these cross sectoral requirements and look forward to working with my fellow Parliamentarians to bridge the digital divide for our constituents. After all, the solutions we each seek will have to be arrived at without a preoccupation with constituency borders and political divides - advancement Mr Speaker - too critical to marginalize and too far reaching to politicize.

I will now devote the remaining time to the important area of Special Projects.

National Spatial Plan/Harmony Cove Integrated Infrastructural Committee

Mr. Speaker, this administration recognizes that proper planning is essential to guide the country's sustainable development. Earlier this year, Cabinet approved the Medium Term Socio-Economic Framework for 2009 to 2012, which outlines the strategies and priorities of government for the next three years. The Plan also outlines the need for an updated and comprehensive National Spatial Plan for the country, which will provide the basis for the

optimal use of the nation's land resources, as well as a framework for their effective use and management.

This is particularly important given the number of development activities – large and small – that are taking place across the island. As a result, the Planning arm of the Ministry has been making strides towards the development of the Spatial Plan. So far, tremendous effort has gone into securing financing, identifying the relevant stakeholders, and finalizing the Terms of Reference that will guide the work to be done towards the development of the Plan.

Based on the current status of that project, Mr. Speaker, it is our expectation that by the end of this calendar year the National Spatial Unit will be established within the Office of the Prime Minister. The Unit will work with all the relevant government agencies to develop the various aspects of the Plan. The Plan is to be undertaken at a cost of US\$969,000. Of this amount, the Caribbean Development Bank will provide a grant of US \$687,000 while the Government of Jamaica will cover the remaining costs through the provision of administrative and technical support to the project. Under this arrangement, the Planning and Development Division will act as executing agency, with NEPA as the implementers.

It is important, Mr. Speaker, to also ensure that we anticipate and plan for the physical and social infrastructural demands that will be associated with the major development projects, which are currently being contemplated. Mr. Speaker, the proposed Harmony Cove development in Northern Trelawny, which is

expected to break ground next year, is the single largest tourism development ever planned for Jamaica. Projected to be an 8,400 room resort spread over 2,275 acres, it is anticipated that the development will provide a variety of luxury activities, including multiple hotel complexes, casino gaming and *Las Vegas style* entertainment centers, along with a host of other world-class features and attractions.

To facilitate this mega-investment, the Government established the Harmony Cove Integrated Development Committee in April of this year. The Planning & Development Division within the OPM, chairs the Committee which is comprised of high level representatives from all relevant ministries and agencies, including the Ministry of Water and Housing. The Committee has been meeting over the past four months with the intention to ensure that Trelawny and the wider Jamaica are adequately prepared to support and fully exploit the benefits arising from a project of such scope.

Mr. Speaker, the key objective of this Committee is to develop a comprehensive strategy and action plan to address the infrastructural requirements of the Harmony Cove project. This would cover areas such as transportation, water and sewerage, as well as social facilities including schools and health care. Attention will also be paid to housing requirements, and in particular the issue of squatter communities. The Committee will also work with Jamaica Trade and Invest and the private sector to identify and promote the linkages and business opportunities that will emerge for our entrepreneurial Jamaicans.

It is envisaged, Mr. Speaker, that this Committee will act as a Model, demonstrating how public and private sector stakeholders can work together to effectively establish the necessary infrastructural and commercial linkages for future development projects, which will all be underpinned by the National Spatial Plan.

Spatial Data Management

Mr. Speaker, as *we* move full speed ahead with the development of the National Spatial Plan, we recognize that one of the fundamental requirements is accurate and comprehensive socio-economic, geospatial and physical data. In recognition of this need, we have been using local technical expertise coupled with the application of information technology, geographic information systems, global navigation satellite systems, web services and database management systems to support the collection, manipulation and management of the various data required to prepare the Plan.

In addition to the extensive data collection exercise that will be undertaken, we have commissioned a Virtual Reference Station Network, named Gfix.net. This Global Positioning System (GPS) will support the efficient and cost effective execution of operations and the delivery of services that are dependent on knowing your location, such as the collection of geospatial data at sub-centimeter accuracies. The National Land Agency is scheduled to begin offering access to the Gfix.net network in late September 2009. Users will be invited to access and test the services in real time, and to post processing modes at a minimal cost for the first

four months of operation. As part of the infrastructure development, we have created a metadata and geospatial portal. These web-based applications allow the public to view, identify and print seventeen layers of information ranging from satellite imagery, major roads and rivers, disaster shelters and location of hospitals among others.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, in acknowledging that data collection and management is critical to proper land management, we are establishing a national spatial data infrastructure to support the National Spatial Plan. This infrastructure will be supplied with the necessary technologies, policies, personnel and data to provide geospatial data throughout all levels of government, the private and non-profit sectors, and the academic community.

Mr. Speaker, the Office of the Cabinet is currently working with an inter-agency group to prepare a policy for the access and sharing of data among public sector entities and we expect to have the policy completed before the end of this financial year. It will provide an open and transparent framework to streamline the exchange of data among public sector entities, thereby contributing to improvements in the delivery of services.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize that the area of geospatial information is new and that there is a need to increase the number of persons equipped with the appropriate skills to take on the job opportunities that will arise. In this regard, we continue to deliver training and education to the public and private sectors in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and related disciplines. For 2008-09, nine sessions on the subject matter were delivered,

and ninety-eight (98) persons from the public and private sectors received certificates of achievement. We also continue to partner with the Caribbean Institute of Technology to develop a GIS certificate programme. The objective is to enable persons with secondary level education to develop world-class GIS competencies and contribute to a growing local spatial sector.

Mr. Speaker, we believe that with increased focus and resources, coupled with the establishment of the Virtual Reference Station Network; access to relevant data and some legislative improvements, Jamaica will be the geospatial capital of the region; in effect, the hub for geomatics services.

Development Approvals Process

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to the Development Approvals Process being implemented by the National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA). Since November 2007, the improved system for the processing of applications has resulted in a significant reduction in the number of applications being carried forward from one quarter to the next and from one year to the next.

One important contributing factor to this level of reduction was the 2008 policy decision to combine the boards of the Town and Country Planning Authority (TCPA) & Natural Resources Conservation Authority (NRCA), and this continues to pay huge dividends. Greater efficiencies have been achieved by considering planning & environmental matters simultaneously, which allows for a more holistic approach to the development applications process.

As a result, Mr. Speaker, NEPA has been able to significantly reduce its backlog of applications and has substantially improved the processing timeline. At the end of budget year 2007-2008, a total of one thousand four hundred and eleven (1,411) applications were carried forward. At the end of this budget year in March 2009, three hundred and forty five (345) applications were carried forward and of these, **only** 34 applications exceeded the targeted turnaround time of 90 days.

In total Mr. Speaker, during the budget year 2008-2009, four thousand one hundred and ninety nine (4,199) applications were processed. Of these applications, those related to planning and environment accounted for two thousand five hundred and ninety five (2,595), of which 65% were processed within 90 days.

Mr. Speaker, NEPA implemented the Applications Management & Data Automation (AMANDA) software in July 2008. Since then, it has strengthened the development approval system by allowing the public access to track development applications online. The system provides information on the major milestones and gives, in real time, the status of development applications being processed by the Agency. The Planning and Development Division of the OPM is now in discussion with NEPA, the Cabinet Office and the Legislation and Regulation (known as the 'Legs and Regs') Committee to implement roll-out of the AMANDA system to the Local Planning Authorities/Parish Councils, beginning with the piloting of the system in the KSAC and Manchester later this year. The pilot will consist of the implementation of AMANDA for

subdivision applications of up to nine (9) lots and under five (5) hectares. The ultimate goal is to create a virtual One Stop Shop.

Mr Speaker, NEPA is planning further improvements in the development approval process and will be working assiduously to:

- Promote a collaborative approach between agencies to review submissions, undertake joint site visits, and coordinate activities with the referral agencies in preparing Terms of References for Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) and in reviewing the Reports.
- Rework the EIA process to allow for ‘front-ending’ of the review process. This initiative will allow applicants to submit EIA Reports along with applications at the same time, hence reducing the timeline.
- Undertake some decentralization of the services offered to stakeholders and clients during the last quarter of this calendar year. Preliminary discussions have begun to establish an office in the western region of the island. This office is to be provided with a core staff with the capacity to facilitate enquiries by developers, accept and undertake preliminary review of applications, and liaise with the Kingston office as required.
- Collaborate with the Legs and Regs Committee and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to establish and operate a Development Assistance Centre (DAC) in the Agency.

Mr. Speaker, I now wish to address the issue of Parish Development Orders. NEPA continues to lead the process in preparing Development Orders (DOs) under the Town and Country

Planning Act (TCPA) in order to guide, regulate and monitor development projects across the island. The process is to be strengthened through the Planning and Development Division of the Office of the Prime Minister, which will take responsibility for coordinating with sector agencies to remove overlaps and fill gaps.

To date, Mr. Speaker, the approved Draft Parish Provisional Development Orders for the parishes of Portland and Trelawny have been submitted for review by the Chief Parliamentary Counsel. Similarly, the Town and Country Planning Authority (TCPA) is currently reviewing the Draft Parish Provisional Development Orders for the Negril/Green Island Area in Westmoreland and Hanover, as well as those drafted for the parishes of Manchester, Kingston & St. Andrew

Mr. Speaker, NEPA will commence community consultations next week across the parish of St Catherine to inform residents of the issues derived from the Draft Parish Development Order. In addition, Mr. Speaker, in St James, NEPA has completed land use surveys for all the growth centers in the parish for the St James Parish Development Order, and is currently meeting with stakeholders.

Land Titling

Mr. Speaker, as I noted in my budget presentation last year, this Government gave its commitment to empower our people by providing them with security of land tenure. We noted on many previous occasions that we were not satisfied with the *status quo* where fewer than half the total number of parcels of land in

Jamaica is registered. In addition, during this year it was revealed that over a third of Jamaican households could be classified as Squatting! This really does not auger well for our social and economic development. In developed countries, every parcel of land, every building, every piece of equipment even, is represented in a property document that is the visible sign of a vast hidden process that connects all these assets to the rest of the economy. Jamaicans need to have that process to represent their property and create capital.

It is no longer about rhetoric, Mr. Speaker. With the recognition that the costs associated with registering land can be prohibitive, we have moved to make substantial reductions in transfer tax and stamp duties payable on all land transactions. This, we believe, will help to stimulate and create a dynamic land market, and make it less costly for persons to get their property registered.

Mr. Speaker, when we came into office, this Government stated its intention to broaden the base of the Land Administration and Management Programme (LAMP) benefits, which are provided for under the Special Provisions Act. Mr. Speaker, this was done. I am now pleased to advise that in addition to the original pilot parish of St. Catherine, the parishes of St. Thomas, Clarendon, and St. Elizabeth have been officially declared LAMP project areas, and work has begun in the National Irrigation Development Programme focus areas within Manchester and St. James, to help farmers achieve the security of tenure they so desire and deserve.

Whereas we are hard-pressed at this time to provide the resources to offer full-scale cadastral surveying of all parcels of land situated

in these parishes, persons within project areas can go to the LAMP team with their own survey diagrams and they will be assisted in getting their property registered. Under LAMP, the legal fees payable by beneficiaries are significantly less than what they would be required to pay to private attorneys. In addition, persons have the opportunity to benefit from the waiver of transfer tax and stamp duty, under the Special Provisions Act.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, we are pleased to report that LAMP performed creditably throughout the last financial year, notwithstanding the various challenges in relation to capacity and public awareness. Some 1,800 case files were opened last year and of that amount, 1609 first registration titles were issued representing lands that had not previously been titled.

National Land Agency

When I last spoke in this Honourable House, Mr. Speaker, I outlined some of the achievements and plans of the National Land Agency (NLA) as they relate to the titling process. I wish to now give an update on those matters:

- During 2008-9, 207 Certificates of Title were issued to beneficiaries of lots in Land Settlement Schemes in St. Ann, St. Mary, St. James, Westmoreland, Hanover, St. Elizabeth, Manchester and Trelawny. I had the pleasure of attending some of those ceremonies and, Mr. Speaker, I felt very proud to be given the opportunity to share with the beneficiaries on those occasions, as some of them had been waiting on their titles for over thirty (30) years.

- The software to automate the processing of the new Certificates of Title is currently being tested, and it is estimated that this will be in place by September 1, 2009. The new security paper on which the Certificates of Title will be printed and which is expected to reduce the possibilities of fraud, has been ordered and should be in use by October 1, 2009.
- The Land Titles Division continues to reduce the turnaround times for certain transactions such as single transfers and single mortgages. During the last fiscal year, two (2) additional transactions were added to the Express Desk, bringing to six (6) the total number of transactions which the Agency will process by way of this Desk. These two new transactions will be processed within 5 days, down from the previous turnaround time of 20 days. This service has been a huge plus with our customers, especially as it is at no additional cost to them.

Mr. Speaker, it is the expectation of this administration that the expansion of LAMP, coupled with the increased efficiency of the National Land Agency, will create security of tenure and well-needed collateral for many Jamaicans. This will in turn help to drive the economic growth of this country as we believe that an accelerated titling programme has the potential to unlock and unleash enormous economic potential.

Legislative Reform and Closing Remarks

It has been said in this Honourable House that efforts to revolutionize telecommunications will need as it were Mr Speaker –

a champion! – Positioned as the Subjects are within the Office of the Prime Minister, I am sure it is understood that even in the absence of youthful exuberance –this Honourable House can rest assured that this process is being well driven by the Chief Driver!

There is agreement on both sides of the House Mr Speaker, that Information and Telecommunications needs the support of a modern legislative framework and I give my commitment that all that can be done to ensure speedy and comprehensive reform will be done. It is with this in mind that we will soon establish a Legal and Regulatory Unit within the Information and Telecommunications Department, with dedicated lawyers whose function will be to see draft legislation through the appropriate processes with our public and investors at the centre of its design.

Amendments to the Access to Information Act, and the repeal and replacement of the Official Secrets Act, are to come Mr Speaker, at the end of the review of the ATI Joint Select Committee.

Mr Speaker, amendments are also to be made to the Broadcasting and Radio Re-Diffusion Act and the Television and Sound Broadcasting Regulations which will strike at the heart of payola and other negative practices in the industry, which have seen to the decline in content standards ‘on air’. We seek to introduce sanctions Mr Speaker, which will act as a deterrent to infringements. I pause to say to members of this Honourable House that while there is no anxiety on the part of government to be overreaching, we must create for ourselves and leave for our children a wholesome Jamaica in which we can ‘live, work, raise families, and do business’. The Regulations will also have to be

amended Mr Speaker, to complete the framework for the raft of new media licences introduced in the most recent amendment to the Broadcasting and Radio Re – Diffusion Act.

Yes Mr. Speaker, the structured support to the wide expanse that is the communications industry together with its related sub-sectors will unlock the potential for heavy revenue inflows to the creators, managers and promoters of our indigenous content – the knowledge based society Mr Speaker, will be built without delay by labour!

The legislative agenda Mr Speaker, also makes provision for us to introduce to our legislative landscape the anticipated Information and Communications Technology Bill and Data Protection legislation - we seek to secure for our citizens and our investors Mr Speaker, the provisions and protections integral to participation in the digital economy .

In 2003, Jamaica along with 174 countries of the world declared at the World Summit on the Information Society, a “...common desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize, and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life”. I will work unwaveringly to make this our reality.

As I close Mr Speaker, I pray for God’s strength and guidance as I discharge the duties of my Office and indeed I pray for all of us. May He bless us as we confront our challenges - may we use our

collective talents to the glory of God and the benefit of our people.
We dedicate our minds and our hearts to the diligent service of
Jamaica.

Thank you Mr. Speaker !