

STATE OF THE NATION

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A New Vision for
**JAMAICA'S
TOURISM**

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STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS

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HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT

NOVEMBER 2024

A NEW VISION FOR TOURISM

“Balancing the Dream”

SALUTATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Mr President, thank you very much and thank you my colleagues. This is my 4th State of the Nation presentation, and I am humbled and grateful to be able to stand in this chamber yet again to outline the reality of our country for all Jamaica to hear and digest.

These have been four years of learning and immeasurable experiences and for that I am forever thankful. My colleagues on both sides, thank you for your support in all forms.

Mr. President, I take my responsibility in this Parliament very seriously. Today I am making what is likely to be my last S.O.N speech here in the Senate - one of 21. However, I also know that it will not be my last in this building. Because Mr. President, I intend for my next speech I will be saying (Mr. or Madam Speaker) when I become Member of Parliament and chief advocate for the people of the constituency of St. James Central.

I deliberated for some time and consulted with my political mentors, my family and friends before deciding to enter representational politics. The magnitude of such a role does not escape

me. When people place their confidence in you, you must deliver and so I commit to you the people of St. James Central and all my Jamaican brothers and sisters to work assiduously for the advancement of our beloved country.

As has been stated before, I commenced my tenure in public service in 1997 at the Ministry of Tourism. Over the years, I have benefitted from the guidance, support and counsel from many former ministers of tourism and political stalwarts.

They, along with my family have helped me to define my role and I carry with me a steadfast commitment and enduring passion for my country...a deep desire,...a hope...a dream and the intention to create a better Jamaica for all Jamaicans! I want a country where there are more Jamaicans who look within these shores to achieve their dreams and aspirations than those who look outside.

The Most Honourable Portia Simpson Miller, the first female Prime Minister of Jamaica and leader of the People's National Party said it best, when she said ***“Leadership is about service, not power”***

Mr. President, I seek to be of service. This is what drives me. This is what I am here for.... I stand in service of my fellow citizen!

I stand also as a daughter of St James—a parish whose people are the backbone of our nation's tourism industry. I bring their collective voices into this Chamber: the transportation providers, the craft vendors, gardeners and bartenders, the waitresses, entertainers and housekeepers, the stewards, tour guides...the entire industry from supervisor and manager to line staff. In fact, Mr. President, I stand here for just about every man and woman whose livelihoods are linked to this industry which EARNs SO MUCH that must deliver MUCH MORE to more of our JAMAICAN people.

STATE OF THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

Mr. President, during my time in Senate, I have brought attention to many issues plaguing the tourism industry. Today I am reminding this Senate of some of the key issues, that if they were addressed, would have prevented the present state of the industry that now requires grounded steady hands to balance the ship for both workers and operators (all the players) in the industry.

I said it here last year and I will repeat it,

“There has to be real investment in what is supposed to be our tourist towns - Ocho Rios, Negril, Port Antonio, Montego Bay. The reason the PNP administration of 2004 designed and implemented the Tourism Enhancement Fund, was to reinvest the earnings of tourism into our towns and communities so that the people can see and feel the impact of tourism. It was also to ensure there is sustainable development of tourism by the investment in new products so that more Jamaicans can benefit from the industry.”

That is what I said in 2023- To date, I have not seen any real investment of TEF funds in Montego Bay for example, other than the sign at the airport. There has been no new attraction created, no investment in the craft markets, no work done on the cruise ship port —nothing!

For there to be real rewards and benefits from tourism, we must resist the urge for disjointed projects such as a few signs here and a few corridors there. We must now design a truly comprehensive restoration of all our tourist towns. Montego Bay does not look like the centre of tourism, nor does it feel like it.

Sidewalks are broken, streets are dirty, and chaos reign and there is still no functioning public hospital that the people can rely on for care. Look at Jimmy Cliff Boulevard (Hip Strip). It has not carried the weight befitting of our icon Jimmy Cliff, who hails from Somerton in St. James.

This so-called Hip Strip is in a bad state and the promises made in the past 9 years by this government to revitalize it and make it attractive have not resulted in anything. Under the next PNP administration, our tourism development plan will make Jimmy Cliff Boulevard truly worthy of our icon's name. *(because right now it neither Hip nor strip- I don't know what it is)*

My emphasis on Montego Bay does not negate the concern I have for all our resort areas, but as you can well appreciate I was born there, I live there and now I seek to represent the people of Montego Bay, St. James Central....some of whom are here with me today and it is because of them why I have this fire in my belly to pursue the idea of better, safer and more decent communities, that all Montegonians can be proud of.

We cannot afford to settle for half-measures or hollow promises when it comes to our tourism sector—a cornerstone of our economy and a source of national pride. Yet, the realities on the ground paint a troubling picture. Our tourist towns, once vibrant symbols of our potential, now stand in stark contrast to the glossy image this government tries to project.

Take Negril, for example—renowned globally for its iconic seven miles of pristine beaches and a haven for tourists, yet locals grapple daily with persistent water shortages, a glaring contradiction in a town that thrives on offering a world-class experience. In Lucea, traffic congestion turns what should be a gateway to Jamaica's beauty into a frustrating bottleneck, emblematic of the inefficiency stifling growth. Across the island, crumbling road networks leave drivers losing tyres, front-end parts, and patience, starkly highlighting the unmet promises of prosperity—***“the spark naa spark!”***

Ocho Rios, once the jewel of the north coast, has been dulled by poor planning, overcrowding, and inadequate facilities, while Portland, with its breathtaking natural beauty, remains overshadowed by chronic neglect and underinvestment.

For nearly a decade, this administration has talked about development, yet our infrastructure is miles behind where it needs to be. Promises have become nothing more than political pageantry—words without action, talk without results. Meanwhile, our people suffer, our towns decay and the opportunities we could be creating for our citizens are left unrealized.

These towns—these gems of Jamaica—deserve so much more than the neglect they’ve endured. It is time to move beyond token gestures and platitudes and take bold, sustainable action. When the PNP forms the next government will not settle for piecemeal efforts; we will prioritize the full revitalization of our tourist towns. These towns will be clean, orderly and equipped with the infrastructure, services, and opportunities that both locals and visitors rightly deserve.

Mr. President, let me make it abundantly clear: **we will FIX it.** We will set aside a dedicated amount from the Tourism Enhancement Fund to kickstart the revitalization of our major tourist towns. We will also focus on beach preservation and restoration and upgrading the capacity of water and sewerage infrastructure.

In other words, we will be investing in public spaces to enhance the quality of life for Jamaicans and the visitor experience.

The People’s National Party has always led the way. It was under our leadership that the program to revitalize our beaches began. We repaired roads to attractions, strengthened community infrastructure for our workers, and sought to uplift every corner of our society. And when we return to government, we will pick up where we left off—finishing what we started with a renewed sense of purpose and urgency. **We will FIX it.**

THE MISMANAGEMENT OF TOURISM

Mr. President, the Jamaican people are asking: **How did we get here?**

Two years ago, the Prime Minister stood in that other place, painting a vision of a successful sector. But that promise has unravelled under the weight of travel advisories, climate shocks, and rising inflation. Our industry, the lifeblood of our economy, has been left vulnerable—exposed by the failure of this Andrew Holness-led administration to act with foresight and urgency.

So let me break this down to explain what I really mean.

Travel Advisories:

On January 24, 2024, the United States issued a travel advisory against Jamaica. This wasn't just a notice—it was a direct blow to investor confidence, causing a sharp dip in tourist arrivals. Any hotelier, big or small, will confirm this. Just this past Sunday, a hotelier confided in me, *"This is the worst year yet for our properties."* The ripple effect of this advisory has been felt across the industry, from the resorts on the coast to the small operators inland, all struggling to stay afloat.

Climate Change:

And then there is Climate Change after that—The imminent threat and impact of climate change are NO LONGER deniable. Acknowledging it and describing it may be sufficient for academics. However, those of us with responsibility for national development by way of policy response and planning must move beyond description to ideation, innovation, and action.

Mitigation and Adaptation programmes are woefully lacking in the sector. A situation that was made even more plain with the passing of Hurricane Beryl this year.

The devastation of Beryl was more than another wake-up call. It was a litmus test which we failed in many respects. All assessments and analysis of the Beryl Response must bear in mind that we were spared a direct hit.

Yet, Resorts reported a 28% decline in net revenue for the quarter ending September 2024, and occupancy rates fell by 14.1 percentage points. These numbers are not just statistics—they reflect real losses for our people and our economy.

The likely impact of events such as Beryl felt by our tourism workers and consumers in their place of residence must from now on become separate parameters to be considered.

Mr President – despite the clear writing on the wall this administration has ignored the urgent need to strengthen climate resilience within the tourism sector, leaving us vulnerable to the next disaster.

Inflation and Rising Costs:

Thirdly the industry is fighting with Inflation, it is the silent storm further eroding the industry's prospects.

Hoteliers, Destination Management Companies, Attractions, they are all grappling with skyrocketing operational costs, while workers endure stagnant wages and rising living expenses. The once-vibrant tourism workforce is now riddled with despondency and frustration, struggling to keep pace with the cost of survival. And operators are finding it difficult to keep out of the red.

Mr. President, the opportunity to reimagine, recalibrate, and realign our tourism sector has been squandered. Rather than investing in resilience, innovation, and sustainability, this administration has doubled down on outdated models that rely solely on mass tourism—models that are no longer viable in the face of today's challenges.

Jamaica's tourism deserves better. Our people deserve better. And it is clear: this government is out of its depth.

THE JAMAICA TOURIST BOARD

The Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB), entrusted with promoting Jamaica as a premier tourist destination, has been conspicuously absent in responding to the damaging travel advisories issued by the United States and Canada, advisories that pose a serious threat to our tourism industry. This silence, coupled with the JTB's overall inaction, is both baffling and unacceptable. As the agency responsible for safeguarding Jamaica's tourism brand, one would expect the JTB to prioritise swift and targeted advertising campaigns aimed at countering the negative perceptions caused by these advisories. Instead, their failure to act has created a void, further exacerbating the damage to our reputation.

Minister Bartlett, who has often declared himself the "chief marketer" for Jamaica, must answer for this glaring failure. Where is the evidence of a strategic advertising campaign aimed at our major source markets to reassure potential visitors and mitigate the fallout?

Has the JTB crafted any messaging tailored to address the specific concerns raised in these advisories, or have they simply defaulted to business as usual? Transparency is severely lacking. We have no indication of what, if anything, has been done to place advertisements in key media outlets or platforms that would effectively counteract this crisis.

Empathy is also woefully lacking. Well do I recall the multiple awards and accolades received by this country, the JTB, and then Tourism Minister Portia Simpson Miller who spearheaded messages of "empathy and compassion" for our major source market in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. This year in addition to Beryl our neighbours to the North have been affected by Irene and Milton as well as a raft of natural disasters – again the result of an ever-warming planet.

Our messaging must become more sensitive and aware of these issues and the impact it has on consumers who increasingly decide as to how, when, and where to spend their money based on messaging and products that reflect an awareness of more than just the profit margins.

This absence of proactive, visible action is not just negligence—it reflects a failure of leadership and strategy. The travel advisories and natural disasters here and within source countries have far-reaching implications for Jamaica's economy, and the JTB's lack of urgency suggests a troubling disconnect from the realities on the ground. The Minister and the JTB must urgently account for this lapse, explain their plans (if any), and commit to an effective and immediate response to safeguard Jamaica's tourism sector. **Anything less is a dereliction of duty!**

(Well, then again – that dereliction won't continue for much longer as the winds of change pick up momentum – so I guess therefore “we will have to fix this too”!)

THE CRISIS IN THE INDUSTRY

Mr President, I find myself speaking on the State of the Nation at a pivotal moment for the tourism industry, where the challenges facing both workers and investors are undeniable. Workers, with full justification, are demanding fair compensation and better working conditions, while hoteliers and investors are equally focused on securing the returns they expect from their investments. It is clear that the stakes have never been higher.

Earlier this week, in a thought provocative conversation with former Prime Minister PJ Patterson, he reminded me of a fundamental truth that every leader must recognise, in regards to the industry. He said:

"Investors are entitled to a fair return on their investments, just as workers are entitled to fair wages and dignified treatment. The true challenge of leadership lies in recognising that these

rights are not in opposition, but are, in fact, two sides of the same coin.” – **This is the balance that MUST be attained with great urgency!**

Now, let me make one thing abundantly clear today: while some may find it politically convenient and timely to say they are 'standing with the workers,' I will remind this Chamber that I've been standing with the workers all along. In every speech I have given in this Chamber, I have spoken for the workers of the industry. The workers in the hotels, craft traders, transport providers, tour guides...I am consistent!

I will continue my advocacy, on behalf of, and for the workers—not because it's popular, but because it is the right thing to do!

COMPENSATION

Let me take you on a brief history lesson. In 1991, the then Minister of Finance, the Hon. P.J. Patterson, took a bold and visionary step to exempt gratuities from income tax during his budget presentation. This policy aimed to improve compensation for workers in the tourism industry. By removing the tax, employees were able to keep more of their hard-earned income, a measure that signalled their immense value to the sector. It went into effect on January 1, 1992, just weeks after being tabled, and demonstrated that the government of the day understood the critical role these workers played in making Jamaica's tourism product world-renowned.

Fast forward to 2009, during a period of fiscal reform under significant economic strain, the government reintroduced income tax on gratuities. On July 21, 2009, the then Minister of Finance, Audley Shaw, signed a Ministerial Order, which took effect on August 1, 2009, imposing a full 25% tax on non-reimbursable allowances, including gratuities. This move, influenced by the conditions of Jamaica's agreement with international financial institutions like the IMF, was

positioned as part of a broader strategy to stabilize the economy and boost revenue during difficult times.

But Mr. President, that was then. Today, as the government boasts of fiscal stability and economic growth, I stand here to say: the time has come for people-centred leadership. I call on this administration—on the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Tourism, and the Prime Minister—to take decisive action. **I demand the immediate removal of income tax on gratuities!** It's high time we ensure that those who bear the weight of our tourism success are justly compensated. This issue needs fixing, and the next PNP government will FIX it!

ABUSE OF CONTRACTUAL ENGAGEMENT

Mr. President, the abuse of short-term contractual employment in the tourism industry is an injustice that cannot be ignored. Time and again, I have raised this issue, but today it is critical to highlight it once more so that Jamaicans can fully understand the devastating effects of these exploitative arrangements on our workers' lives.

Let me be clear—contractual work has its place in the workforce. However, the problem lies in its misuse and over-reliance. Take, for example, a housekeeper who has worked at the same hotel for six years. Instead of being offered permanent employment, those six years are broken into 3- or 6-month contracts. That individual for example, is engaged on January 1, sent home at the end of April for a two-week break, and then brought back on May 15 under a new contract. This cycle repeats for years, creating instability and uncertainty for the worker.

What does this mean in real terms?

It means that this worker has no assurance of a job after each contract ends. It means

that if they try to access a loan or enter a hire-purchase arrangement, they face rejection because they lack the security of permanent employment. Formal financial institutions will not take a risk on someone with such precarious work arrangements, forcing these workers to turn to the informal economy to meet their needs.

Mr. President, this cycle is crippling. It locks workers out of opportunities to own a home, access formal banking systems, and build stable, productive lives. Without the ability to secure a loan after years of hard work, they are left with no choice but to "capture" land or remain stuck in informal living arrangements. This isn't just about employment; it's about the dignity and future of our people.

I must acknowledge the recent announcement by one hotel, where they committed to transitioning employees who have been on contract for three years to permanent positions. While this is a step in the right direction, it also underscores the systemic nature of this problem. Waiting three years for stability is too long. I urge that this threshold be reduced to no more than one year.

Mr. President, these are the issues that should have been at the forefront of the Minister of Tourism's agenda. Instead, the Minister seems more preoccupied with personal accolades. Workers in the tourism sector need a champion who will fight for their rights, not a Minister who spends more time in the air than on the ground. Today I call for there to be constructive dialogue between all the players in the industry led by the Minister himself and colleagues. A course has to be charted for the future of those who are the backbone of the industry!

This situation must be fixed, and the time for change is now. The abuse of contractual arrangements must end. Under the next PNP-led government, we will FIX IT.

CRAFT SUB-SECTOR

The recent announcement by Prime Minister Andrew Holness to waive the J\$3,000 monthly government rent for craft market vendors reeks of an election ploy, designed more to garner short-term political support than to address the systemic challenges plaguing the craft sub-sector. While superficially presented as a form of relief for struggling vendors, the initiative is largely symbolic, offering negligible financial benefit to shop operators who face much larger problems than monthly fees.

The primary issues for craft traders are not the payment of minimal rent but the lack of consistent business opportunities, poor market infrastructure, competition from imported goods, and limited growth prospects. Instead of addressing these structural challenges, the government has chosen a headline-grabbing announcement that sidesteps substantive action. Craft vendors are rightly frustrated, as their daily struggles—deteriorating facilities, low foot traffic, and insufficient marketing support—remain unaddressed.

The timing of this announcement raises valid concerns about its sincerity, given its proximity to election campaigns. The minimal financial impact of the waiver underscores its tokenistic nature. It is difficult to see how J\$3,000—a mere drop in the bucket for most vendors—will meaningfully change their circumstances. This creates the impression of a government more concerned with optics than with implementing policies that create tangible, long-term improvements.

All of Jamaica has seen the response by the vendors that has gone viral. A responsible government listens to the people and responds based on their needs to make their lives better for the long term. The people are tired of band-aid fixes or responses that show you are only doing it for a “forward”.

The PNP has proposed several initiatives to support and uplift Jamaica’s craft vendors which includes:

- Modernising Craft Markets: Investing in the upgrade of market infrastructure to create cleaner, safer, and more attractive environments for both locals and tourists.
– There has **only been one new market developed in 9 years! None has been renovated.**
- Increased Visibility for Craft Markets: Launching dedicated marketing programmes to boost foot traffic, including partnerships with the Ministry of Tourism to feature craft vendors in major tourism campaigns. – There has been **No Marketing Campaign in 9 years since this government.**
- Craft Vendors' Council: Creating a national council to provide vendors with a formal platform to advocate for their needs and influence policy decisions, ensuring continuous support and feedback mechanisms. - **Vendors have no council anymore through which a sustainable plan for development can be channelled. Not under this current government.**

These are some of the initiatives that were aimed at addressing the systemic challenges faced by craft vendors, moving beyond symbolic gestures to implement policies that create tangible, long-term improvements in their livelihoods. **When we return to Power we will FIX it! We will make Craft Trade a priority! – Under the Ministry of Tourism.**

THE GENESIS AND DECLINE OF TOURISM TRANSPORTATION SECTOR

Mr. President, the discontent in the industry extends beyond the accommodation sector and hotel workers. The transport sector is also struggling, with declining profits driven by higher barriers to entry and the inability to remain competitive due to the vertical integration of foreign-owned entities expanding beyond their intended areas of investment. Transportation has always

been a critical part of the tourism industry, as visitors need reliable services to travel from the airport to their accommodations, attractions, entertainment, shopping, and other destinations. This requires a well-structured and coordinated system, where destination management companies and independent taxi operators play a vital role.

In 1974, under the leadership of former Prime Minister the Most Hon. PJ Patterson, who held the portfolio of Industry, Trade & Tourism in the Michael Manley-led government, a groundbreaking initiative was born. Along with the late, great Jamaican transportation and tourism pioneer, Glen Bromfield, Mr. Patterson crafted and established the Jamaica Union of Travellers Association (JUTA).

JUTA was established to empower local transportation providers and give them a stake in Jamaica's growing tourism industry. By granting access to prime hotel parking areas, these providers could transport visitors to attractions, restaurants, and entertainment venues, helping them build their businesses while contributing to the vibrant tourism sector. JUTA drivers, always immaculately dressed and professional, became a cornerstone of the industry, their commitment to excellence defines Jamaica's tourism. Their work enabled them to build homes, educate their children, and uplift their communities, playing a key role in the rise of a new Jamaican middle class driven by opportunities created through tourism.

Mr. President, I know of what I speak. I have personal ties to this legacy, as my own uncle Jolly Johnson was a proud member of JUTA, embodying the values of self-reliance and service. The work of Mr. Patterson and the founding president, Mr. Glen Bromfield, was nothing short of seminal in the development of our tourism industry.

I take this opportunity to honour the life of Mr. Bromfield, who passed away a few weeks ago. He was a true stalwart of the industry—a visionary and a patriot—whose contributions will be felt for generations to come."

Today, JUTA, JCAL and Maxi Taxi drivers face mounting pressures and have been crying out for help so that they aren't further squeezed out of the tourism industry. I hear leaders in the industry speak now about the need for the industry to be more inclusive but I will remind us all of my statement I made last year:

*It is time we institute a policy whereby certain businesses are designated to be Jamaican-owned only. At some point we have to have the political will to make the move to secure Jamaican businesses. Services like **entertainment, landscaping, water sports, staff canteen in addition to transportation and tour desks**, in various places are being moved to foreign-owned companies and this should not be allowed to continue. Let more tourism dollars trickle into the economy by ensuring these businesses remain with Jamaican companies!!!"*

I again call for the outright protection of the transportation sector so that only Indigenous Jamaican-owned businesses should operate transportation in the tourist industry. We must protect our Jamaican businesses to allow them to flourish and claim a piece of the tourism pie. Other countries in the region have done it. What are we waiting for? IT IS TIME! If it is not done by this current government, then no worry, when we form the government we will do it. WE WILL FIX IT!

- We will protect the transportation sub-sector of the tourism industry.
- We will mandate that all hotels facilitate licensed and regulated taxi operators to provide services from the hotel facilities.

- We will ensure access is free of cost. The hotels will not be permitted to charge fees or commissions to registered taxi operators who are providing legitimate services.
- We will stop the hotels or the international companies from extracting money from Jamaican hands and shipping it overseas, and,
- We will establish clear policies and guidelines for the sector with the matching legislation.

While this current minister talks about **linkages we are seeing leakages** and the next PNP-led administration will plug those holes. Where there should be trickle down it is all trickling out and this must stop. There is not enough of the trickle down for us to allow it to be extracted from our economy!

When the taxi man has to pay US\$5,000.00 to access a park and US\$500.00 per month, that is not a linkage, that's leakage. This will stop under our administration. Never again!

Minister Edmund Bartlett has presided over the greatest leakage this industry has ever seen. All this was allowed to balloon under his watch and continue unchecked. This industry is in a crisis, the transportation sub-sector is crying out for help but it seems the minister can't hear because he is asleep in-flight to somewhere.

Carrying Capacity and the Ecosystem of Tourism

Mr. President, tourism does not operate in isolation; it depends on functioning ecosystems—roads, infrastructure, public services, community adoption, and people.

Since the Tourism Master Plan for Sustainable Development was implemented in 2002, there has been no real assessment of the strain the current tourism model places on our environment, infrastructure, or our people. Have we truly considered the impact of this model on these systems?

Last year, during the State of the Nation debates, I raised the alarm about the lack of planning and foresight in the government's approach to development, pointing out that they were proceeding without considering the long-term consequences for the Jamaican people.

Today, we are witnessing the effects of this neglect, and rather than addressing the underlying issues for a sustainably developed tourism industry, this government continues to take a band-aid, reactive approach

Last year I said...

"You can't speak of investment without speaking of capacity. A responsible government will develop according to a plan that is beneficial to the people, the environment, and the overall economy. A balance must be struck..."

*Mr. President, last year I called for there to be a development policy to guide what types of investments and where the developments are to be located because it would be unfortunate for us to continue grabbing at all investments to the detriment of our people and environment. Let us be smart and considerate with our development plans. **THE TIME IS NOW!***

***A PEOPLE'S NATIONAL PARTY** Government will undertake to have a defined development policy that guides this process because we are mindful of the impact this current approach is having. We welcome investments. But we must be guided by the requisite studies to facilitate.*

I spoke with a luxury villa owner—a Jamaican born to American parents, who relocated to Montego Bay and now runs his villa in western Jamaica. His villa fetches upwards of US\$4,000 per night for a multi-bedroom unit, attracting high-end clients from across the world. However, he's increasingly concerned about the experience his visitors face driving from the airport to the villa. This is making it harder for him to sell his property. On top of that, he's dealing with the high

costs of running his business in an area where the infrastructure doesn't meet the expectations of his guests

Imagine that tourists take to social media to complain about something as basic as roads. ***(reference video circulating with tourists who arrived in Montego Bay and had to travel to Negril)*** There is minimum standard of roads that are now not there. This is the simplest expectation of any government, yet this government continues to fail. I warned about this in my last S.O.N and now today the roads are worse than ever.

The TEF, during the tenure of both Dr. Wykeham McNeill and before him, Ambassador Aloun Assamba, was used to invest in road infrastructure leading to tourist towns and resort areas. This is no longer happening but when the PNP returns to government we will FIX IT!

And here is the ultimate question: **how can the very thing meant to improve the lives and livelihoods of Jamaicans instead become a source of exploitation?** Mr President I borrow the words from my colleague Senator, 'What Can Go So?' Poorly thought-out developments displace communities and bypass those most in need. Tourism must be a bridge to better living standards, not a tool for extraction.

Mr. President, the difference between this government and the next PNP-led government is a focus on sustainability and development that pays keen attention to the impact of said development.

That's why we had the Tourism Master Plan for Sustainable Development. And that is why when we return to power we will FIX IT and ensure that any future development of the industry will be predicated on a plan.

We are not going to be focused on announcements of hotel rooms, we will be focused on announcements of how many Jamaican lives are transformed. We won't be focused on awards

and accolades, we will be focused on how many small businesses are birthed, protected, and developed.

We will therefore commission the study and design of a new Tourism Master Plan to take us into our next phase of development. This will be a priority for the next government led by Mark Jefferson Golding, the next Prime Minister of Jamaica.

A VISION FOR TRANSFORMATION

Mr. President We stand at a crossroads, and it is clear that the decisions we make now will shape the future of our tourism industry and our economy. The time for change is upon us, and it begins with a clear vision for action.

1. A New Deal for Workers

We must take decisive steps to protect our workers and ensure that their rights are not just promises, but realities. It starts with:

- Ending rolling contracts and ensuring job security for our workers, so they can plan for their future with confidence.
- It means mandating fair wages and improving working conditions to ensure dignity and respect in every workplace.
- And it also means introducing incentives for employers who invest in worker welfare, fostering a culture of care and mutual growth.

2. Protecting Indigenous Jamaican Businesses like Transportation

- We must put in place protections for our local businesses. We must ensure that policies are in place to protect their interests while encouraging growth and innovation.

3. Resilient and Inclusive Growth: Building on the New Tourism Master Plan for Sustainable Development

To achieve long-term success, we need to build resilience into the very foundation of our tourism industry. This means:

- Investing in infrastructure and transportation that connects our rural communities to tourism hubs, ensuring that growth is inclusive and benefits every Jamaican.
- Embedding strategies for climate change adaptation and mitigation, so that our industry can withstand the impacts of changing weather patterns and continue to thrive.
- Implementing robust, technology-driven programmes to preserve and restore our beaches and mangrove forests, ensuring that our natural resources are protected for generations to come, even as we face the inevitable effects of climate change.

4. Preparing for the Future

We cannot afford to stand still. To secure our future, we must:

- Prioritise sustainability in all areas of tourism, from development to operations, in order to combat climate change and protect our planet.
- Diversify our offerings to tap into emerging markets like digital and eco-tourism, positioning Jamaica as a global leader in these growing sectors.

CONCLUSION: A CALL FOR CHANGE

Mr President, tourism is not just an industry—it is a promise. A promise that every Jamaican, from the craft vendor in Falmouth to the tour guide in Negril, should share in the wealth it generates. It is more than just economics—it is about hope.

Imagine a young girl growing up in St James, dreaming of one day becoming a manager at a prestigious hotel. That girl should see a system that works for her father and mother—giving them dignity, fair pay, and stability. She should see a pathway of opportunity that makes her dream not just possible, but inevitable. -

I am impassioned about this because I am beyond tired. Mr President, the people of Jamaica are beyond tired. The parents are beyond tired. The workers are beyond tired. The operators are beyond tired. Our society is certainly beyond tired of promises without results, tired of being overlooked, and tired of a system that asks for their sweat and labour but in too many instances gives them too little to show for it. Our nation's family is beyond tired and fatigued.

This is no longer about politics, Mr President. This is NOT about power! This is about people's lives—their dreams, their families, and their futures and I believe in my heart that tourism can deliver it as a bridge that connects hope with opportunity!

Mr. President, the time has come for us to choose people over politics, progress over neglect, and to seize the opportunity before us. It is time to rise to the challenge and reclaim the true promise of tourism—the NEW TOURISM—not just for today, but for generations to come.

But it all boils down to one thing: **Who holds the pen?** The power of the pen has never been more glaring, Mr. President. It is the pen that writes policy, that shapes the future, and determines who benefits from the resources and opportunities our nation has to offer. And with significant urgency, we will **grab back the pen**—because it's time for policies that serve our people, not just our pockets. We will grab back the pen—because our workers, our communities, our small

businesses deserve more than empty promises. And we will grab back the pen—with the determination to build a Jamaica that works for everyone, where no one is left behind.

Jamaica, we hear you. Jamaica, we see you. And Jamaica, we are coming to rescue you.

Together, we can build a tourism industry that serves every Jamaican, lifts every community, and fulfils the dreams of every citizen. Together, we can restore hope, create lasting change, and ensure a future where every person matters.

Let us rise to this moment, for the future of our nation depends on the choices we make today.

Thank you, Mr. President.