

A portrait of Phillip Paulwell, a Black man with short hair, smiling. He is wearing a dark blue suit, a white shirt, and a blue patterned tie. The background behind him is a yellow and black halftone pattern.

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***CHAMPIONING  
CHANGE***

**in Energy, Climate Change & Agriculture**

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**Shadow Minister**

Energy & Climate Change

**Contribution to Sectoral Debate**

**by Phillip Paulwell**

**Spokesman on Energy and Climate Change**

**May 13, 2025**

**Championing change to Achieve Greater Power  
for the People in Energy, Climate Change and  
Agriculture.**

Madam Speaker, I am proud to announce that this year marks my 30th year of service to this Parliament. I have done 2 years of State of the Nation debate in the Senate, and today I do my 28th presentation in these Sectoral Debates.

I regard service to one's country and people as one of the highest forms of service. I have served willingly and joyfully, through good and bad times, but Madam Speaker, if I were given the opportunity to relive my life, I would repeat what for me has been a life of total dedication and commitment to my country and my people.

Madam Speaker, in all of this, I have come to recognise one thing that the Jamaican people desire and want...TO BE HAPPY!!! They are not looking to be in a perpetual state of ecstasy; they simply want a roof over their heads, a viable job, to live in a safe community, and general contentment that their families are doing and living well. But Jamaicans are not happy today, Madam Speaker. If they were, we all know elections would have come much sooner. At this point, the Jamaican people have rejected and dismissed any notion- any whisper- of prosperity. They see the country heading in the wrong way, and if "prosperity" were any further out of reach, we'd need a telescope to spot it.

The Jamaican people, having given this JLP government two terms to try to make them happy and bring them prosperity, are disappointed and dissatisfied. They now want a change; a change that will give them greater Power over their lives, a change that will see them as the centre of all

positive developments, a change to a new government that cares for the people.

And what is the main reason for this unhappiness? In a single phrase it is the High Cost of Living (HCOL). The HCOL has been a feature of life for the past nine years. And with the HCOL comes stagnant income, because the economy itself is not growing.

Madam Speaker, a major factor driving both the high cost of living and the lack of growth is Energy!! The high cost of electricity has been a staple in Jamaica for the past nine years. Our consumers pay high bills at home and then pay again in higher prices for basic goods and services. Meanwhile, our economy limps along, uncompetitive and weighed down by these costs.

Madam Speaker, every year when I address this Parliament, I not only speak about the problems facing the energy sector but I also provide proposals toward solutions. Yet, my suggestions are largely ignored by the government.

### **Jamaica Public Service Licence**

Madam Speaker, last year, as I did the year before, I again alerted the country to the pending end of the JPSCo licence in July 2027. I urged the government to use this as leverage to secure concessions from JPSCo so that meaningful changes could start immediately. I mentioned that one area that the government could pursue right away (among others) was to convince JPSCo to allow operators/developers in special economic zones

to generate and distribute electricity. But, true to form, my advice was ignored.

During the Standing Finance Committee in February of this year, I reminded everyone that by July 7, 2025, the government must inform JPSCo of its intentions regarding the negotiations for a new licence. The government responded by indicating that the World Bank would be providing assistance. Apparently, after nine years, the only thing this government has mastered is outsourcing its homework. This work should have started two years ago (2023) when I gave notice of it in my sectoral presentation.

Stakeholders have told me, and the Minister has confirmed, that a World Bank team was recently here conducting interviews. I would have expected the World Bank to consult with the Opposition early, especially in an election year. But, as usual, the Minister promises “next time when the team returns to Jamaica.”

We are now in May, and the government is still only in the preliminary stages of consultation. I repeat that this consultation should have started two years ago and completed by now!

I am also very concerned, Madam Speaker, that the Energy Council, established in 2012 to address issues just like this, has not been convened to provide guidance. Minister, what is the status of the Energy Council? Is

this government committed to meaningful consultation with stakeholders in the sector?

Let me be clear, Madam Speaker. The negotiations for a new JPSCo licence is fundamental to our future, and especially crucial to the twin issues of cost of living and lack of growth. The situation is nothing like it was in 2001 when the licence was first granted. But now, just as the previous administration was bold and visionary in negotiating better terms with Cable and Wireless in 2000, we too must be bold now.

If the World Bank had reached out to me, I would have suggested the following areas for reform;

- The duration of any new licence must be shortened appreciably.
- Abolish the right of first refusal that is accorded to JPSCo; all future large-scale generation projects that would add capacity to the grid must proceed by way of a transparent international tender.
- Allow operators and developers in Special Economic Zones to generate and distribute electricity.
- Full support for the implementation of wheeling arrangements must be written in the licence.
- Provisions to facilitate a revolution in rooftop solar, with special licences to include feed-in tariff as incentives (as opposed to the current net billing licences)
- Consumer rights measures need to be enhanced, such as;
  - the removal of exemption-of-liability clauses in agreements with consumers
  - more elaborate guarantees for service.

Let me be clear about our intention: We are not here to destroy JPSCo! We are here to lower the price of electricity so that our people can truly progress with a lower cost of living and greater economic growth. When the economy grows, everyone benefits, including JPSCo and other producers. Right now, our average electricity use is shockingly low because people can't afford to use more. In developed societies, usage is two to three times higher than it is in Jamaica. When the price of electricity is reduced, JPSCo. will benefit from increased usage. Also,

JPSCo. will need to focus on adding new revenue streams such as the provision of electricity for the growing electric vehicle market etc.

### **Electricity Theft**

Madam Speaker, I will soon be sounding like a stuck record on the issue of the stealing of electricity. The fact is that in 2021, I provided this house with detailed suggestions on how this problem can be dealt with by the government. I followed up with a Private Member's Motion from then to engage in a meaningful debate focusing on the role of government as the major player to solve this national problem. To date, nothing has happened so that consumers continue to bear an additional expense of about 20% on their bills.

Let me quote from the Minister's sectoral presentation last year:" Among the Ministry's priority initiatives is the non-technical loss reduction. In

August 2023, with support from the IDB and USAID, a National Electricity Loss Reduction Plan was completed. The Plan,

supported by the Energy Loss Independent Report of 2023, outlines a comprehensive strategy to address electricity theft. The strategy outlines ten key initiatives costing US\$74.5 M...

From the announcement of these interventions last year, I have heard nothing. No green paper has been tabled, much less discussed. No meeting of the Energy Council has been called to discuss in that forum. Nor how much funds have been spent so far, and for what?

At the rate at which we are going, with the prevailing high cost of electricity, the problem of electricity theft will persist for the foreseeable future. Time Come for a Change!!!

### **GCT on electricity bills**

Madam Speaker, recently, the government attempted to provide a benefit to consumers by adjusting the GCT on electricity bills. The net effect has caused confusion. Firstly, consumers using below 150 kWh per month will now be paying GCT of 7%. They were granted a subsidy and rebate of 10%, thereby getting a net benefit of 3%. This smacks of an electioneering ploy as no timeline was given for the duration of the subsidy and rebate. Moreover, all prepaid customers will now be burdened with a GCT of 7% for the first time without the benefit of a subsidy or rebate. This is an example of a three-card trick on the people.



## **Petrojam**

And while you are at it, Minister, will you indicate the position of the government with regard to Petrojam? The company made a significant loss last year due to this indecision about its future. The sword of Damocles continues to hang over this very important institution that has served Jamaica well.

## **Power To the People/the Democratization of Electricity**

Madam Speaker, a major plank of our policy is to promote the rapid expansion in the deployment by individuals of renewable energy, especially using solar technology. A special incentive scheme will be announced shortly, focusing on access to low-cost financing and a much straightforward process to secure an energy licence with built-in attractive feed-in tariffs. Also, a future PNP government has committed to building 50,000 houses for low-income families within five years. We will ensure that all these houses are equipped to provide energy and have additional capacity to sell electricity to the grid.

## **Climate Change**

Climate change is the single greatest threat to the future of humanity; it is now firmly placed in the category of an existential crisis. The need for urgent and meaningful measures from all nations is as great now as it was

when the Paris Summit in 2016 was held and various commitments were made.

Our Party remains committed to the following:

- The international pledge to restrict the growth for global temperatures to rise by less than 2 degree Celsius.
- Climate justice and common but differentiated responsibilities. This is in recognition of the duty of developed countries to do more and go further in their commitments as a result of their historical responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions.
- Financing and the Green Climate Fund. The GCF, which sets aside finances to climate change mitigation and adaptation, is a crucial plank of the climate agenda.
- Reduce emissions from Forestry (REDDT). The reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation and forest destruction.
- Reduce emissions from agriculture.
- Measurement, reporting and verification. A robust system of measurement, reporting and verification is needed.
- Individual Responsibility.
- Green Energy Transition, which is the replacement of fossil fuels by various forms of renewable energy.
- The ongoing battle for dealing with the climate change crisis must continue to be a global one and Jamaica must be at the forefront.

We welcome the recent appointment of Professor Dale Webber as Jamaica's first special envoy for climate change, and we wish him well. We now await his frequent briefings to this Parliament.

Madam Speaker, we know that Jamaica, like so many small island developing states, is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change not only in terms of our natural resources but also our social well-being and our economic development, as sectors such as tourism, agriculture, fisheries, forestry, and water are very climate sensitive. Yet, we saw the unregulated development and destruction of mangroves at Fort Rocky. Prior to that, in 2020, we saw NEPA's permit denial for quarry mining in Dry Harbour Mountains being overturned by the Prime Minister himself for "economic benefit" in spite of the irreversible damage that would be caused to a limestone forest. Actions like these are untenable. Recently, I gave a presentation on the impact that climate change has on health, and I was amazed by the information that was revealed from my research. I will share that at another time. As I said last year, as soon as we return to office, we will have to amalgamate all the various projects in a much more coordinated and focused way within the National Budget. I repeat also that we will embark on a sustained public education programme aimed at all levels of the population and sectors of the country.

I will again seek answers on the following projects:

- Increased emissions sequestration from the forestry sector. What about the funds that should have been spent on mangroves?
- What is the update on the project to reduce system losses in electricity transmission and distribution.

- What about the goal of increasing energy efficiency in the production of alumina to 90%.
- Then there's the lofty goal of achieving 291 MW of new solar pv by 2030 as also 121 MW of onshore wind capacity, 36 MW hydro, 20 MW biomass and 18 MW waste to energy. These goals cannot be achieved by 2030.
- Electricity savings of 19,800 MWh per year by 2023. Failing here too.
- Reducing final electricity intensity in the water services sector by 10% by 2030.
- Reduction in traffic congestion in the KMA. This has died a natural death.
- Electricity consumption in retrofitted facilities to fall by over 15 GWh annually. No updates here.

Madam Speaker, we must move from tagline to a mindset so that our people will fully understand that we are facing real danger that will have far reaching consequences on things we take for granted

### **Agriculture: A Call to Action**

Madam Speaker, let me turn to a matter fundamental to our nation's future, our agriculture sector. Still under the theme "Championing Change," I present an honest assessment of where we stand and, more importantly, where we must go.

Our agriculture sector, the backbone of Jamaica's economy and rural communities, is at a crossroads. It is time to rally together, take decisive action, and champion the change our farmers and our nation urgently need.

My colleague and Spokesman on Agriculture, Dr. Dayton Campbell, has already highlighted many of the critical issues, and I join him in emphasising the need for bold reforms. While the Minister has made efforts, they have been woefully inadequate if we want to maximise the full potential of agriculture and do right by our farmers.

### **Current Challenges and the Need for Action**

Let's not sugarcoat it, agriculture is more than just a sector; it is the backbone of Jamaica. Supporting over 262,000 farm families and contributing around 9.2% to our GDP, it sustains countless livelihoods and provides employment for 20% of our workforce. Yet, despite its importance, our sector faces significant challenges that threaten its very future, challenges that the Minister is either blind to or simply refuses to see.

Over 80% of Jamaican agriculture remains subsistence-level: small-scale, often unprofitable, and vulnerable to every passing cloud and market whim. In the fourth quarter of 2024, we saw a 12% decline in agriculture, contributing to a 1.8% downturn in the broader economy. When our agriculture sector suffers, so does our economic stability. But the Minister, it seems, is content to fiddle while Rome or should I say, Jamaica, wilts.

Our major challenges include limited access to land, inadequate infrastructure like irrigation, roads, and storage, insufficient financing, and poor market access. Praedial larceny continues to plague our farmers, eroding their income and discouraging investment. If we do not address these issues head-on, we risk further decline and the erosion of our agricultural heritage, leaving future generations to wonder how a nation so rich in land and talent could be brought so low by poor vision and even poorer governance. Left unattended, these problems will not simply disappear; they will become entrenched, making it even harder for our farmers to provide for their families or compete in a modern world. Madam Speaker, it is high time we stopped treating these chronic issues as background noise and started treating them as the national emergencies they truly are.

### **Land Reform Policy**

Land, Madam Speaker, is the foundation of productive agriculture. Jamaica's land reform history is rich, from post-emancipation initiatives to the Land Settlement Act and the PNP's Land Lease Programme. Sadly, however, the agro parks introduced in 2005 under previous policies have underperformed only 30% of the available land is currently being utilised. This shows the Government's lack of commitment to producing locally.

The PNP is committed to expediting the issuance of land titles, because a farmer with no title is like a runner in a race with his shoes tied together, going nowhere fast. Land titles will enable our farmers to access real financing and have collateral they can actually use. We'll tailor leases to

specific farm activities, introduce performance-based leasehold improvements, and reform our land tax regime.

Moreover, prioritising youth and women in land distribution will promote inclusivity and innovation. Idle lands must be acquired and redistributed to serious farmers, those who will cultivate, innovate, and grow.

### **Agricultural Development Fund**

Access to finance remains a critical barrier. Madam Speaker, we propose developing an Agricultural Development Fund that will provide targeted, sustained investments. This fund will support infrastructure, research, technology adoption, and disaster risk mitigation. A percentage of this fund will also be allocated to the PC Bank, enabling it to offer loans to farmers. This will ensure that our agricultural sector receives the financial backing it so desperately needs.

### **Agricultural Free Zone**

To further stimulate growth, we propose the creation of an Agricultural Free Zone strictly for export-led production. This zone will attract investment in agro-processing, value-added production, and exports. It will offer tax incentives, modern facilities, and streamlined regulatory support, creating an environment where innovation flourishes, jobs are created, and Jamaica becomes a competitive player in global markets. This, Madam Speaker, is what you call planting seeds for the future, not just planting headlines for tomorrow's newspaper.

## **Infrastructure: Irrigation, Roads, Storage**

Madam Speaker, only 15% of our arable land is irrigated—a statistic so low, it could only impress someone who confuses “progress” with “press releases.” Our National Irrigation Development Plan (NIDP) must be fully implemented and expanded so farmers can produce year-round, rain or shine. Improving farm roads is equally vital. Right now, some of our farmers need a 4x4 and a boat just to get their produce to market.

Cold storage capacity must be expanded, and in the meantime, we must implement solar-refrigerated containers to reduce post-harvest losses and ensure fresh produce reaches consumers promptly. A modern, efficient infrastructure network is the backbone of a resilient agricultural sector.

## **Financing and Public-Private Partnerships**

Our current financing landscape is, frankly, a desert only J\$147 million in loans were disbursed in 2023. That’s not support, Madam Speaker, that’s pocket change. The PNP will increase budget allocations and promote public-private partnerships in machinery, irrigation, cold storage, and marketing. Collaboration with the private sector is essential to drive innovation and efficiency. Unlike the current approach, we don’t believe in “all talk, no tractor.”

## **Market Access and Technology**



In today's digital age, technology offers unprecedented opportunities. We will leverage digital platforms to connect farmers directly with buyers, hoteliers, distributors, and retailers, cutting out the middleman and cutting out old excuses for extortionate prices. We propose implementing an agricultural monitoring system that utilises drones for crop monitoring and fertiliser spraying—technologies that enable precision agriculture. Drones will provide real-time data on crop health, pest outbreaks, soil conditions, and irrigation needs, allowing farmers to apply fertilisers precisely where needed, reduce waste, and increase yields. Additionally, we will promote hydroponic farming practices to maximise productivity and resource efficiency.

### **Research, Training, and Security**

Partnering with UWI, CASE, and other institutions, we will invest in research into plant varieties, animal genetics, and modern farming systems. Our research facilities, Bodles, Orange River, and Montpellier, must be strengthened to support innovation.

Praedial larceny remains a scourge. To combat it, we will propose that praedial larceny be included under the Proceeds of Crime Act. If someone is convicted of stealing farm produce, their assets will be liquidated to restore the farm to its previous state. Additionally, we will move the burden of proof in these cases from the claimant to the defendant, ensuring that those accused of theft must prove they came by the goods lawfully.

### **School Feeding Program**

We also propose a comprehensive school feeding program. According to the FAO, 55% of Jamaicans are suffering from food insecurity, and among schoolchildren, this translates to approximately 260,000 children. While the Government has announced an increase in the breakfast program, it is still not enough. We will establish a proper school feeding program where all needy students receive at least one nutritious meal per day, with ingredients sourced from local farmers.

### **SMART Plan: Sustainable Management of Agriculture through Research and Technology**

We will facilitate the upgrade of livestock genetics to improve productivity. For example, heifers in Jamaica currently produce around 7 litres of milk per day, while their counterparts elsewhere produce up to 18 litres. We also plan to assist our fisher folks in expanding freshwater fishing and upgrading livestock genetics.

This SMART plan will include the use of drones not only for land preparation but also for crop monitoring and fertiliser spraying technologies that enable precision farming, tracking crop health, pest infestations, and irrigation needs. This will support more efficient resource use and higher yields. Additionally, we will promote hydroponic farming practices to increase yields and conserve resources.

### **A Call to Action**

Madam Speaker, agriculture is the heart of Jamaica's sustainable future. With only 15% of our land irrigated, 30% utilisation of agro parks, and a food importation bill that has nearly doubled from \$834 million in 2016 to \$1.5 billion today, not due to inflation but because of increased tonnage, we face a crisis that cannot be ignored. The Government had pledged to reduce the food importation bill by 25% by 2025, yet we have not made progress.

Under no circumstances can the Minister of Agriculture believe that they are doing a good job. It is time to act decisively for the farmers of Saint James, Westmoreland, St. Ann, Trelawny, and all parishes. We must do right by our farmers and secure a brighter future for all Jamaicans. The PNP is committed to championing these changes in agriculture.

### **Conclusion: The Time for Courage, The Time for Change**

Madam Speaker, I close this presentation with a deep sense of urgency and a firm belief that we are running out of time.

Jamaica is facing an energy crisis. We remain too dependent on imported fuel while the rest of the world surges ahead with renewables. We are vulnerable, exposed, and unprepared.

We are also one of the most climate-vulnerable countries on Earth. Yet we behave as though we have the luxury of delay. We do not. Rising seas, extreme droughts, and stronger hurricanes are already here, and they are only getting worse.

And Madam Speaker, our food security is hanging by a thread. More Jamaicans are hungry today than a decade ago. Farmers are struggling. Inputs are expensive. Imports are rising. And still, no clear plan to feed our people in a time of global instability.

This is not just mismanagement. It is a failure of vision. And Jamaica cannot afford that any longer.

We need bold, courageous, and competent leadership to move us from crisis to resilience. We need leaders who understand that energy, climate, and food are not separate issues but the backbone of national security and development.

The People's National Party, with Mark Jefferson Golding at the helm, is ready to lead that charge. We are ready to implement the transformative policies that Jamaica desperately needs. Not tomorrow. Not next year. But now.

This is not the time for small thinking. This is not the time for empty promises. This is the time for change in order to progress real growth. And only the People's National Party has the courage, the plans, and the political will to deliver that change so that our children inherit a country that is sustainable, sovereign, and secure.

'Madam Speaker. Time Come to champion change. Let's secure Jamaica's future together. Thank you.