

PARLIAMENT OF JAMAICA
SECTORAL DEBATE | 21 APRIL 2026

**BUILD WITH PURPOSE
BUILD WITH PEOPLE**

ENERGY AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS

MP Phillip Paulwell

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Leader of Opposition Business | Member for East Kingston and Port Royal

Madam Speaker, Jamaica stands at a defining crossroads.

The decisions this Parliament makes on energy and telecommunications will determine whether our people pay less for electricity, whether our entrepreneurs can compete in the digital economy, and whether Jamaica leads or lags the region for the next generation.

The People's National Party comes to this debate with a clear and unwavering conviction: that the only sustainable path forward for this country is to build with purpose and to build with people. Every proposal I lay before this Parliament today is rooted in that conviction.

That is what I have come to address today.

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Build With Purpose | Build With People

I give thanks to the Almighty for the strength and the privilege to serve.

Madam Speaker, I pay tribute to the people of the great constituency of East Kingston and Port Royal who have once again elected me for the 7th straight term. And counting my time in the Senate I am now in my 31st year in this parliament. Every one of those years has been in service to the people of East Kingston and Port Royal, people who know, as I know, that when I win, they win.

I extend special thanks to my councillors and constituency leadership, my task force and my staff. I thank my Party Leader for his continued faith in me as Spokesperson on Energy and Telecommunications, and as Leader of Opposition Business. It is a responsibility I carry with the utmost seriousness.

Madam Speaker, I did not come here today to reflect on the past. I came to speak about Jamaica's future.

In a moment, I will lay before this Parliament a set of specific and actionable proposals for Energy and Telecommunications that, if adopted, will lower costs for Jamaican households, accelerate our digital transformation and position this nation as a competitive force in the Caribbean economy.

Before I proceed, Madam Speaker, a brief word on my role as Leader of Opposition Business. Much of the substantive work this year will centre on the review of the Standing Orders, a process I welcome, and to which the Opposition is fully committed. We look forward to engaging with the comprehensive CPA document that you have provided. Our goal is a Parliament that is more dynamic, where minority voices carry real weight and where democratic oversight is genuinely enshrined. I will address this more fully in the Standing Orders Committee.

PARLIAMENTARY PRINCIPLE

Madam Speaker, there is one matter of parliamentary principle I must place on the record, because it speaks directly to the integrity of this institution and to the quality of our democracy.

The role of the Speaker is, by constitutional design and long-standing convention, one of strict impartiality. The Chair exists above the partisan divide as the guardian of fair process for all Members, Government and Opposition alike.

It is therefore a matter of institutional concern, one I raise with respect for the office and not for the individual, that we have recently witnessed the Speaker's presence in contentious committee meetings in a manner that has been perceived as lending support to the Government's position. This is, to my knowledge, without modern precedent in this Parliament.

If we are serious about Standing Orders reform, and if we are serious about strengthening Jamaican democracy, then we must also be serious about protecting

the impartiality of the Chair. That protection is not a courtesy. It is a constitutional obligation, and it is one I call on all Members of this House to uphold. I therefore ask, respectfully Madam Speaker, that you resist your Party's inclination to demean your office and resign from all the committees that are likely to bring the office of Speaker into disrepute.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Madam Speaker, I am grateful to our Party Leader for returning the portfolio of Telecommunications to my stewardship. I do not receive it as a ceremonial honour. I receive it as a mandate to complete work that was left unfinished.

When I last held this portfolio, this Parliament oversaw one of the most consequential economic transformations in Jamaica's modern history: the full liberalization of the telecommunications sector. That decision opened our airwaves to competition, drove down costs for Jamaican consumers, created thousands of jobs and attracted foreign investment at a scale this sector had never seen. It was a model that every Caribbean nation subsequently followed, and one that international bodies have cited as a proven standard for developing economies.

That legacy belongs not to any single individual, but to the vision of a People's National Party administration that was prepared to make bold decisions in the national interest. I am proud of it. And I say to this Parliament today: the boldness that built that foundation is precisely what this sector now requires again.

Madam Speaker, we should pause to recognise two significant milestones that fall this year. Digicel, the only multinational company to have been founded in Jamaica and subsequently exported its reach and its character to markets across the world, celebrates its 25th anniversary and we should salute them. The Universal Service Fund, a cornerstone instrument for extending connectivity to every corner of this island, marks 21 years of distinguished operation and we should salute them as well. These are not mere footnotes. They are proof that when Jamaica gets its telecommunications policy right, the results are felt in communities, in businesses and in the international reputation of this nation.

Add to these the Spectrum Management Authority, the e-Learning initiative, the e-Government Company Limited which has become Information Communications Authority (ICTA) and the other institutions built during that period of reform, and the record speaks with clarity. This party built the architecture of Jamaica's digital infrastructure. We have every right to hold this Government to account for what has or has not been done with it.

Madam Speaker, I say all of that not to dwell in the past, but to provide an honest baseline against which the present must be measured.

And when that measurement is made, the conclusion is uncomfortable. The telecommunications sector in Jamaica has, for the better part of a decade, been advancing at a pace that is simply not commensurate with the demands of the modern digital economy. Policy ambition in this sector has stalled. The last meaningful reform to be delivered was the implementation of number portability, which this

member introduced to Parliament in advance of the 2016 general election. That was ten years ago.

What was left on the table in 2016 remains on the table today. The issues identified then as urgent priorities have not been resolved. They have simply been deferred, whilst the world has moved on and the gap between Jamaica's regulatory framework and the realities of a rapidly evolving global sector has continued to widen.

Madam Speaker, allow me to place on the parliamentary record the five areas of unfinished business that this Shadow Ministry intends to address with full determination in the period ahead. Each of these is a commitment not to process, but to purpose and to people.

First, the convergence of technology must be met with a convergence of regulation. The boundaries between telecommunications, broadcasting and internet services have, in practical terms, ceased to exist. Our regulatory architecture has not kept pace. A unified regulatory framework is not a technical nicety; it is a prerequisite for fair competition and consumer protection in the digital age.

Second, Jamaica's transition from 4G LTE to 5G infrastructure cannot be allowed to proceed without a clear national strategy. Fifth-generation connectivity is not simply faster internet. It is the foundational infrastructure upon which the Internet of Things, telemedicine, precision agriculture, smart cities and the next generation of Jamaican industry will depend. We need a plan, and we need it now.

Third, the co-location of telecommunications infrastructure must be made a regulatory requirement. Competing providers constructing parallel and duplicated

physical infrastructure is wasteful, visually intrusive and economically inefficient. Mandated sharing of towers and physical assets reduces costs, accelerates deployment and ultimately benefits the Jamaican consumer.

Fourth, monopolistic control over access to submarine fibre cable capacity must be directly addressed. Fibre connectivity is the arterial infrastructure of the digital economy. Where access to it is controlled by a single dominant player without sufficient regulatory oversight, the result is higher prices and constrained competition. This Parliament must act to ensure that open access principles are properly enshrined in our regulatory framework.

Fifth, meaningful competition must be introduced in those basic service segments where market concentration continues to work against the interests of ordinary Jamaicans. Competition is not an end in itself; it is the mechanism by which consumers receive better service at lower prices. Where it is absent, the regulator must act. Where the regulator has not acted, this Parliament must demand an explanation.

Madam Speaker, the five structural issues I have just outlined are matters of regulatory policy. But I wish also to speak to the lived experience of Jamaican consumers, because it is that lived experience which ultimately justifies the urgency of reform.

The quality of telecommunications service in Jamaica is, by any objective measure, below the standard that consumers are paying for and below the standard that a properly regulated market should deliver. Call interruption rates remain persistently

high. Consumers are routinely charged for bandwidth that the network is not, in practice, delivering. These are not minor inconveniences. They are consumer rights failures, and they speak directly to the adequacy of regulatory enforcement in this sector.

The Office of Utilities Regulation has an obligation to enforce service quality standards with rigour and transparency. This Parliament has an obligation to hold it accountable for doing so. I intend to exercise that obligation fully.

Madam Speaker, I conclude this portion of my contribution with a matter that recent events have placed beyond any reasonable debate.

When Hurricane Melissa made landfall and subjected this island to one of the most severe weather events of recent years, the telecommunications providers of Jamaica demonstrated genuine commitment in their efforts to restore service to affected communities. I place on the parliamentary record my sincere acknowledgement of that work and the personnel who carried it out under difficult and at times dangerous conditions.

However, the very fact that restoration was required on that scale must prompt this Parliament to ask a harder question: why was the network so vulnerable in the first instance, and what legislative and regulatory measures are in place to ensure greater resilience before the next major weather event arrives?

The services provided by our telecommunications networks are not a luxury. In a modern society, they are as essential to survival as electricity and clean water. Emergency communication, the co-ordination of relief efforts, the functioning of

financial systems and the safety of our most vulnerable citizens all depend upon the continued operation of these networks when they are needed most.

This Parliament must therefore act with urgency to require greater redundancy in our telecommunications infrastructure, to mandate minimum resilience standards and to establish clear accountability frameworks for recovery in the event of a national emergency. This is not a future aspiration. It is an immediate obligation of governance.

SUBSEA FIBRE CABLE

Madam Speaker, even as we press for a more resilient telecommunications infrastructure, we must register our concern regarding a recent government initiative. On 2nd February 2026, the Government announced that it is engaging Trans Americas Fiber Systems Limited to design, build and operate a subsea cable branching unit into Jamaica, together with an associated cable land station, at a cost of US\$50 million.

Let me remind this House that when we liberalised the telecommunications industry in 2000, we achieved competition in relation to fibre access by awarding licences to two companies, one of which, Fibrelink, deployed service. At the time, I ensured that the Government would have adequate access to the fibre network by earmarking such provision within the licence granted. That facility remains available to the Government to this day.

Unfortunately, the second fibre company subsequently merged with Cable and Wireless and became Flow, and we no longer have competition in that segment of the market. Prices are now very high, and we would welcome a return to a fully competitive environment. We are, however, deeply concerned about the role that the Government intends to play going forward.

Madam Speaker, we call again for full transparency. Nothing has been said publicly since the announcement in January. This Parliament and the Jamaican people deserve clear answers to the following:

First, what is the total cost of the facility and how will it be financed? Second, has a written agreement been concluded with Trans Americas Fiber Systems Limited, and when will it be shared with the Opposition? Third, on what basis and by what process will access to the facility be determined. Fourth, what is the defined and bounded role of the Government in the operation and governance of this facility?

Madam Speaker, we support the addition of greater bandwidth capacity for the country. However, we question the extent of government involvement, particularly given that, as I have noted, adequate fibre access has already been guaranteed to the Government. There is, in our view, a viable business case for this to be pursued as a successful private sector venture. We await the Government's answers, and we await them without further delay.

COMPETITION IN MOBILE SERVICES

Madam Speaker, we welcomed the Minister's announcement, four years ago, of a new entrant into the cellular market. We were informed that the requisite telecommunications and spectrum licences had been granted. This Parliament now

requires a full and transparent update on the status of that commitment. Where is the new provider? When will Jamaican consumers see the benefit of that additional competition?

We equally require confirmation that the policy on the sharing of telecommunications infrastructure is being implemented in practice. We had mandated a comprehensive co-location policy, and it is essential that this framework is genuinely accessible to new entrants into the market, not merely recorded on paper.

On the matter of service quality, I must return to what consumers are experiencing daily. The frequency of dropped calls and the persistent disruption of data services represent an unacceptable failure of the regulatory environment. Consumers are paying premium rates for services that are not being delivered to the standard contracted. I call upon the Office of Utilities Regulation to address this matter with urgency, to report publicly on the corrective steps being taken and to examine whether a compensation mechanism can be introduced to provide Jamaican consumers with some measure of restitution for credits lost as a result of service failures.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Madam Speaker, given the central importance of telecommunications to daily life, and particularly to national resilience in the event of disasters, there is a compelling need for sustained investment in research and development within this sector. Such

investment must be independent of the commercial interests of individual telecommunications operators.

This is also a matter of talent retention. Many of our brightest graduates are not attracted to working within the existing telecommunications companies but would be genuinely motivated to develop new solutions and pursue postgraduate research in this space if accessible and adequately funded research programmes existed at our local universities. This is an opportunity we are allowing to pass us by.

The decommissioning of the 2G network has been completed, and the eventual decommissioning of the 3G network is a matter of when, not whether.

I don't believe that sufficient preparation especially with public education was done for the decommissioning of the 2G network. A thorough assessment of the industries, applications and public services that remain dependent upon 3G infrastructure is urgently required, so that the transition can be managed in an orderly, planned and non-disruptive manner.

Additionally, as mobile network operators continue to seek approval for new base stations, particularly in rural communities, they encounter growing resistance from residents who are understandably concerned about the potential health impacts of radiofrequency signals. This is causing delays in the achievement of national broadband coverage targets. A sustained, credible and evidence-based public engagement campaign, conducted in conjunction with local academic institutions, the World Health Organisation and international regulators such as Ofcom and the FCC, is needed to provide clear information and appropriate reassurance to the Jamaican public. The National Environment and Planning Agency, in its current

capacity, is not adequately equipped to conduct independent testing in this area. Either it must be specifically strengthened for this purpose, or a separate, dedicated authority must be assigned the responsibility.

THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT

Madam Speaker, the Telecommunications Act of 2000 has served Jamaica well over more than two decades. However, we are firmly of the view that the legislation is now in urgent need of a comprehensive review. The nature of emerging technologies and the evolution in the way that established terminologies are applied means that the language of the Act requires updating to reflect current realities.

More fundamentally, the regulatory structure established by the Act must be modernised to take account of the convergence of technologies that I have already described. A regulatory framework that was designed for a world of separate, distinct services cannot adequately govern a world in which those services have merged. A single, unified regulatory body with the mandate and the capacity to govern the converged telecommunications landscape is no longer a matter for future consideration. It is an immediate legislative necessity.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Madam Speaker, the continued development of high-rise buildings in Kingston and in other urban centres has the potential to disrupt existing radiofrequency links. Whilst acknowledging the importance of development, there must be a corresponding requirement for any building of three storeys or above to obtain

verification from the regulator that no existing microwave or broadband links will be adversely affected by interference with line-of-sight connectivity. Where disruption is confirmed and a licensee is required to relocate, the reasonable costs of that relocation should be recoverable from the developer.

There is also a need for clear regulations governing the structures upon which mobile network operators may mount base stations. Base stations are currently mounted on a wide variety of structures, including post offices, supermarkets and schools. In the context of our changing climate and the increasing frequency of severe weather events, an urgent reassessment of the suitability and safety of those locations is required. The impact of Hurricane Melissa and future weather events on telecommunications infrastructure is not confined to remote base stations. There are numerous locations across Kingston and other towns where multiple broadband antennas are mounted on the roofs of commercial buildings. Where those structures are damaged in a storm, the recovery of telecommunications services will be significantly delayed.

Even though no 5G licences have been issued as yet, there is an urgent and immediate need for a proactive national policy and regulatory framework governing the placement of 5G base stations. Fifth-generation infrastructure will require a far denser network of base stations than previous generations, positioned in much closer proximity to one another. When licences are granted, the Government must ensure that a structured, standards-based approach governs every installation, whether on lamp posts, purpose-built structures or building facades. This cannot and must not be left to the unfettered discretion of the operator.

UNIVERSAL SERVICE FUND

Madam Speaker, as the Universal Service Fund marks 21 years of service to this country, I wish to salute its leadership and its dedicated staff. Their commitment to deploying free WiFi facilities across communities, often in challenging circumstances and with evident enthusiasm, represents the original mandate of this institution at its best. They have made a genuine and substantial contribution to enabling Jamaicans to access the internet.

However, we have not yet achieved the goal of universal broadband connectivity across the island. The mission was to ensure that every Jamaican, in every community, has ready access to broadband. That mission remains incomplete.

From as early as December the Human Rights Council of the United Nations had declared that access to the internet is a basic human right. In today's society, the internet is a necessary component of the exercise of the right to freedom of expression, and its use promotes progress of society as a whole.

My concern centres on the resources made available to the Universal Service Fund. The Fund requested approximately \$1.4 billion to continue the rollout of its free WiFi network. It received approximately \$400 million. That is a wholly inadequate allocation for the scale of work that remains to be done, and I make a direct appeal to the Ministry of Finance to give this matter the priority it deserves.

Furthermore, I have received complaints from communities across the country regarding the maintenance and upkeep of existing free WiFi installations. Many have remained out of service for extended periods. It is self-defeating to invest substantial sums in installing these facilities if they are then left without adequate maintenance

funding. The Government must ensure that both the capital investment and the ongoing operational support are appropriately funded.

ENERGY

Madam Speaker, the importance of energy to the growth of our economy is not a new argument, and I am fully aware that this House has heard it from me before. I make no apology for returning to it, because the problem has not been resolved and the consequences for the Jamaican people grow more severe with each passing year.

The high cost of energy continues to impose a heavy burden upon this country. It bears down on every household struggling to make ends meet, on every commuter trying to get to work and, on every business, fighting to remain viable. Until this issue is addressed with decisiveness and genuine political will, sustainable economic growth will remain out of reach.

On the matter of electricity pricing, the Minister would have the country believe that the high price of electricity is attributable to the terms of the JPS licence. It is necessary to address that claim with the clarity and directness it demands.

The JPS licence came into being in 2001, before I assumed responsibility for the energy portfolio. Over its life, it has been amended by both the Jamaica Labour Party Government and the People's National Party Government, whenever it was determined that changes were necessary in the national interest. It is due to expire in July 2027. There is no legal impediment that has prevented this Government from initiating early negotiations and seeking a new licence before that expiry date. The

truth, Madam Speaker, is that the failure to act has been a matter of political choice, not legal constraint.

Let me remind this House of the record. The price of electricity in 2016, under the very same JPS licence, was US\$0.26 per kilowatt hour. Today it is in excess of US\$0.40. That increase has occurred under this Government's watch, under the same licence it now uses as an excuse.

We did make substantial changes to the JPSCo licence in 2016!!!The amendments to the JPS licence that I effected in 2016 fundamentally restructured Jamaica's energy mix. At that time, approximately 95 per cent of electricity was being generated from heavy fuel oil and diesel, with only 5 per cent from renewable sources. As a direct result of the changes to the licence , Jamaica's energy mix today stands at approximately 60 per cent liquefied natural gas, 25 per cent heavy fuel oil and diesel, and 15 per cent renewables. That restructuring produced a significant reduction in electricity prices. It was deliberate policy, not accident.

Jamaica's Energy Mix: Then and Now

2016 (Before Reform)	Current
95% heavy fuel oil and diesel	60% liquefied natural gas
5% renewables	15% renewables
0% LNG	25% heavy fuel oil and diesel

Let me remind this House of the determined effort required to expand the share of renewables on the national grid. There was a time when I was advised, in the strongest terms, that adding more than 5 per cent of renewable generation would cause unacceptable instability in the grid. I rejected that advice and insisted that all parties work towards a substantially higher renewable contribution. In 2013, the Government mandated the Office of Utilities Regulation to procure approximately 120 megawatts of electricity generated from solar and wind sources. That mandate was delivered under the same JPS licence that this Government has used as its excuse for inaction. It resulted in a reduction in electricity prices.

Since that time, not a single additional renewable energy project has been added to the national grid. That is not because of the JPS licence. That is the direct consequence of government negligence and the absence of sustained political will.

I recall equally the considerable effort required to establish the policy of net billing and to issue the associated licences. We wanted to enable individuals and companies generating electricity from renewable sources to sell their surplus to JPS through net billing arrangements. The resistance was substantial. Nevertheless, I was able to implement the policy and granted more than 700 licences to individuals and companies, enabling them to connect to the grid and provide cheaper electricity to JPS. Those achievements were realised under the same JPS licence, not through the goodwill of the company, but because a government was prepared to put the interests of the people first.

The modernisation of our electricity laws and the incorporation of a more transparent regulatory system also came about as a result of the 2016 negotiations and the new licence subsequently issued to JPS. The Electricity Act of 2015 was itself the product

of a government that would not wait passively for a licence to run its full term but was prepared to act in advance of it when the national interest so required. That same Act mandated its own review by 2020. That review has still not been completed.

Let me pause here to pay tribute to the JPS workers who have laboured tirelessly since the devastation of Hurricane Melissa to restore electricity to the extent that it has been restored. I was critical of the company's performance following Hurricane Beryl, and it is entirely appropriate that I now acknowledge this improved response. That said, full restoration has not yet been achieved. There remain too many households and businesses in Westmoreland and elsewhere still without electricity. I make a direct and heartfelt plea on their behalf: restore their service without further delay.

The Truth About the JPS Licence

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Energy has given the country the false impression that the fundamental cause of high electricity prices is the JPS licence. .

The fundamental reason for the high cost of electricity is the failure of the government to continue with the effort to diversify fuel sources!!!! There is also the need to extract more benefits from the LNG transformation by introducing competition to that market. No new electricity licence, however well-crafted, will produce significant price benefits in the absence of the above which is entirely dependent on the government.

The JPS licence does, of course, require substantial modification to address changes that have become necessary since 2016. I have been identifying those changes in this Parliament since 2023. Had we been the Government, those changes and a new licence would already be in place, and the country would have been spared the uncertainty and the investor hesitancy that the current Minister's public conduct has generated.

The Government has squandered ten years in which meaningful action could have been taken. The establishment of a negotiating committee and the contracting of foreign advisers, in the current climate of uncertainty, represents a waste of public resources and a further delay that Jamaican consumers simply cannot afford.

The consequences of this mismanagement are visible and measurable. Licences were issued to Sunterra and Wigton for 100 megawatts of solar capacity more than a year ago. To this day, not even the power purchase agreements with JPS have been concluded. Investors are reluctant to commit in an atmosphere of regulatory uncertainty, and that delay translates directly into higher electricity prices for every Jamaican consumer.

Madam Speaker, I will now set out clearly and specifically the elements that must form the basis of any new JPS licence. These are not aspirations. They are requirements.

1. The right of first refusal currently enjoyed by JPS for the replacement of its existing generation capacity must be removed. Any new generation licence

must be procured through the Government-owned GPE entity by way of an internationally competitive tender, with awards based on the least cost of available renewable technology supported by the most efficient storage solutions.

2. Wheeling must be implemented immediately. This is the facility that permits a large commercial or industrial enterprise to generate electricity at one location and to transport it across the national grid to its other facilities, subject to a reasonable transmission fee. This policy has been waiting for implementation since 2016.
3. Owners and tenants of Special Economic Zone facilities must be permitted to generate their own electricity and distribute it within the zone. This will reduce operational costs, improve competitiveness and attract investment.
4. Both homeowners and businesses must be enabled to sell surplus electricity generated from rooftop solar installations to the national grid. The pricing structure for electricity sold through net metering licences must be genuinely incentivised, through an appropriate feed-in tariff mechanism.
5. The distribution of electricity must be liberalised to accommodate microgrids. Microgrid licences are to be awarded on a competitive basis, with a specific mandate to provide service to unserved and underserved communities. Access

to electricity is a right. Every community must be served, even where a subsidy is required to make that provision economically viable. This is what it means to build with purpose and to build with people: not to confine transformation to those communities that are already well-served, but to extend it to every household on this island.

6. There must be a clear and enforceable mandate for the reduction and elimination of illegal connections and unmetered electricity usage. The Government must accept a substantially greater share of responsibility for addressing this practice than has hitherto been the case. Penalties for such occurrences in wealthy communities must be increased. The Government must fully subsidise the proper wiring of homes in underserved communities and mandate the wider deployment of prepaid meters.
7. The function of dispatch must be exercised with full transparency by the Office of Utilities Regulation, and not by JPS.
8. The separation of JPS accounts and operational functions, already mandated by the Electricity Act of 2015, must be implemented without further delay: generation, transmission and distribution must be clearly and accountably separated.

9. The system of billing must be made fully transparent. All charges must be disaggregated, including generation, transmission, distribution and all categories of system losses.
10. Consumer protection standards must be comprehensively updated. The guaranteed standards must reflect current operational realities. For example, since the introduction of the JPS mobile application, some customers have experienced extended waiting times for new connections. JPS currently counts the five working days guaranteed for a new connection from the moment an agent opens the application, even where the application has been sitting unassigned within the system for a number of days prior to that. This is not acceptable and must be corrected. Automatic compensation for breaches of guaranteed standards, which was mandated in 2016, requires effective monitoring and enforcement. Prepaid customers have faced particular hardship, including situations where widespread technical failures have left them unable to reconnect in a timely fashion. Given that smart meter technology now enables immediate reconnection upon receipt of payment, the standard requiring physical visits and 24-hour waiting periods is entirely obsolete and must be updated accordingly.
11. The completion of the transition to LED streetlighting must be mandated and the provisions of the 2016 licence in this regard must be enforced without further delay.

12.The smart metering provisions of the 2016 licence must similarly be enforced.

13.Energy efficiency and conservation must be elevated to a genuine national priority, and JPS must be required to actively promote and support both.

14.The role of the Office of Utilities Regulation as sector regulator must be updated to provide for an expanded and clearly defined remit in relation to emergency situations such as hurricanes.

Those, Madam Speaker, are the elements of a new licence. I say to the Minister: call in JPS now, begin those negotiations now, and whilst you do so, insist on the immediate implementation of the 100 megawatts of solar already licenced and move without delay to procure a further 250 megawatts.

PETROJAM

Madam Speaker, Petrojam is being asked to carry water in a basket. In its current condition, the company will continue to record substantial losses year upon year, and the Jamaican taxpayer will continue to bear that burden without any clear prospect of recovery.

As I revealed during the Standing Finance Committee meeting of 6th March 2026, Petrojam recorded a loss of approximately \$4 billion for the financial year ended

March 2025, and a further loss of approximately \$4 billion is projected for the financial year ended March 2026. This is an enterprise that was once consistently profitable. It is now entering its third consecutive year of significant financial decline.

To our amazement, the Minister announced that Petrojam was operating under a price cap!!! When was that institutionalized? Does that not interfere with the previously transparent process of determining weekly pricing of petroleum products? The tampering with the Petrojam pricing mechanism with increase suspicion about government interference in the affairs of the refinery. If the Government wishes to help consumers especially now with the increase in price due to the war between the US and Iran then it should adjust its tax intake at the pump, not by plunging Petrojam into more losses.

And speaking about taxes- what has become of the Hedge Tax? Those funds have disappeared in the sink hole of the consolidated fund with nothing to show for it.

The Minister must provide this House with a full account of the operational status of the refinery and present a clear, credible and costed roadmap for returning Petrojam to profitability. The Jamaican people cannot continue to underwrite a failing enterprise in the absence of that transparency.

The path forward for Petrojam was mapped out clearly during our administration. That plan included a programme of expansion and modernisation. The refinery is now more than 40 years old and continues to rely on outdated technology that hampers its efficiency and drives up operational costs. We do not require another consultant to produce another assessment of alternative operating options. The

Muse, Stancil and Company report of 2006 remains available. The Zacca report was completed in 2019 and was, only at the Standing Finance Committee meeting of 6th March 2026, finally dismissed by the Minister after seven years of silence. That is not governance. That is drift. The war between the US and Iran is clear proof why it remains important to have a well run, efficient local refinery.

In this context, I wish to draw the attention of this House to the Gleaner editorial of 10th March 2026, and in particular to its observation that the Petrojam situation provides another opportunity for Jamaica to engage seriously with the intersection of geopolitics and energy policy and to arrive at a national consensus on the way forward.

That editorial was written in the context of Venezuelan crude oil once again becoming accessible to the Jamaican market. The heavy and sour nature of Venezuelan crude is, as Members will know, well suited to the processing capacity of our refinery. And there is an additional dimension to this opportunity that should not be overlooked. Venezuela will shortly begin the commercial exploitation of its substantial proven reserves of natural gas. Jamaica should be positioning itself to benefit from access to that supply as a cheaper source of liquefied natural gas. A revived arrangement along the lines of Petrocaribe, extended to include liquefied natural gas, is not a fanciful proposition. It is a strategic opportunity that a serious government would be actively pursuing.

We have not yet secured the full benefits of our liquefied natural gas supply arrangements because we have never achieved meaningful competition in that market. That must change, and this Parliament must press the Government to say how and when it intends to change it.

OIL AND GAS EXPLORATION

Madam Speaker, my conviction regarding the hydrocarbon potential of Jamaica's territorial waters was formed in a single, defining meeting. When I sat with the late Dr Raymond Wright and spent several hours reviewing three decades of Petroleum Corporation of Jamaica data, I became firmly convinced that Jamaica sits atop significant hydrocarbon systems.

It is true that wells had previously been drilled without yielding commercial quantities. But oil shows were recorded in ten of those wells. That is not failure. That is evidence. With the advances in deep-sea exploration technology that have occurred in recent decades, I believed then, and I believe now, that the search must continue.

However, the Government of Jamaica could not fund this work alone, constrained as it was at that time by the commitments of a strict IMF agreement. I therefore did what responsible stewardship of this portfolio required. I took Jamaica's geological data, our technical case and our ambition on a road show from Dallas to Dublin, seeking credible international partners. After all that effort, a single serious player emerged: Tullow Oil, which has since become United Oil and Gas.

A five-year agreement was signed in 2015. The commitment was explicit: the completion of three-dimensional seismic data collection, followed by drilling no later than 2020. Even as we signed that agreement with Tullow, we were in parallel negotiations with Repsol, and I will be direct with this House: the terms being

developed with Repsol were, by any assessment, significantly more favourable than those of the first arrangement.

Then came the 2016 general election, and a new government took office. Those superior negotiations with Repsol were abandoned.

Madam Speaker, I am deeply disappointed by what has followed since 2016. The promised obligated timeline has not been met. In place of results, this country has been subject to periodic titivating and tantalizing revelations by press releases and conferences all geared to excite and to PR a project that should have reached much further by now. We could remain in this holding position for many more years if the Government doesn't insist that the terms of the licence which requires actual drilling to take place be done. Once the results of the 3D seismic survey was known then drilling should have started. This survey was done about 3 years ago. In place of a drill bit penetrating the seabed, we have received marketing exercises from a licence holder whose resources appear inadequate for the task. This Government's commitment to advancing oil and gas exploration must now be called into serious question.

The time for patience has passed. The licence holder has failed to honour the terms of the agreement. The extensions that have been granted have been far too generous. I call upon this Government to treat those failures as the leverage that they have to revisit every substantive term of the agreement, to secure financial terms that are materially better than those under the original arrangement and to give effect to the penalties for failure to perform.

Jamaica's hydrocarbon potential has not diminished. What has diminished is the Government's sense of urgency in realising it. That must change.

CONCLUSION

Madam Speaker, everything I have placed before this Parliament today, from the modernisation of our telecommunications framework to the restructuring of our energy sector, from the revival of Petrojam to the resumption of oil and gas exploration, is guided by a single, unshakeable principle. We do not build for meaningless statistics or for press releases. We build for the Jamaican people. We build with purpose, and we build with people. That is the commitment of this Opposition, and it is the commitment we will bring to government.

God Bless Jamaica, Land We Love!!!