

SECTORAL PRESENTATION

OPPOSITION SPOKESMAN ON LABOUR AND SOCIAL SECURITY

JUNE 29, 2016

SALUTATIONS

MR. SPEAKER, COLLEAGUES ON BOTH SIDES OF THIS HONOURABLE HOUSE, I RISE THIS AFTERNOON TO MAKE THE OPPOSITIONS CONTRIBUTION TO THE SECTORAL DEBATE ON THE PORTFOLIO OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL SECURITY.

AS THE OPPOSITION'S SPOKESPERSON ON LABOUR AND SOCIAL SECURITY, I AM ACUTELY AWARE OF THE AWESOME RESPONSIBILITY OF THE TASKS THAT I HAVE TO CARRY.

INDEED I VENTURE TO SAY THAT THERE ARE SOME WHO MIGHT CONSTRUE THAT THIS PORTFOLIO CARRIES IN A DISPROPORTIONATELY BURDENSOME WAY THE DUTY OF SPEAKING FOR SOME OF THE MORE DISADVANTAGED GROUPS IN OUR SOCIETY- THE VERY POOR, THE UNEMPLOYED, AND THE DISABLED AMONG OTHERS, AND IN THAT REGARD THEREFORE, I SPECIALLY WISH TO GREET ALL WHO ARE WATCHING OR LISTENING.

1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

MR. SPEAKER, ALTHOUGH IT HAS BEEN SAID MANY TIMES OVER, I SHOULD LIKE HANSARD TO RECORD MY OWN CONGRATULATIONS TO PRIME MINISTER ANDREW HOLNESS FOR HAVING LED THE JLP TO VICTORY IN THE FEBRUARY 25 GENERAL ELECTIONS.

I SHOULD ALSO LIKE TO CONGRATULATE THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION THE MOST HONOURABLE PORTIA SIMPSON MILLER FOR HER LEADERSHIP OF THE PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION IN THE RESPONSIBLE WAY SHE HAS ENSURED THAT THE OPPOSITION IS NOT USED AS A TOOL TO FRUSTRATE THE EFFORTS OF GOVERNMENT, BUT HAS BEHAVED IN A WAY THAT IS IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE WELFARE OF THE PEOPLE OF JAMAICA.

MR. SPEAKER, IN THE SAME VEIN I SHOULD LIKE TO EXPRESS THANKS TO THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION FOR GRANTING ME THE PRIVILEGE TO SPEAK ON THE MATTERS OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL SECURITY.

I SHOULD ALSO WISH TO COMMEND THE MEMBER FROM ST ANN NORTH EAST FOR HER ELEVATION TO THE CABINET AND HER ASSIGNED PORTFOLIO OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL SECURITY. I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO THANK HER FOR HER PRESENTATION YESTERDAY

WHICH WAS COMPREHENSIVE AND CLEARLY DEMONSTRATED THAT SHE HAS HIT THE GROUND RUNNING IN THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL SECURITY.

CONSTITUENCY MATTERS

MR. SPEAKER, I OFFER THANKS TO ALMIGHTY GOD FOR THE FAITH AND TRUST OF THE PEOPLE OF ST. THOMAS EASTERN.

EVER SINCE 1993, THEY HAVE RETURNED ME AS THEIR MP, AND THIS THE 6TH CONSECUTIVE TIME WAS WITH THE LARGEST NUMBER OF VOTES AND THEREFORE MAKING ME A "SIX STAR GENERAL".

MR. SPEAKER, I WILL CONTINUE TO MAKE STRIDENT REPRESENTATION ON THEIR BEHALF, AND EVEN AS I SPEAK IN THIS HONHOURLABLE HOUSE TODAY, THEY HAVE GIVEN ME A MESSAGE FOR THE PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR WORKS TO ENSURE THAT THEY RECEIVE THEIR HIGHWAY FROM HARBOUR VIEW TO PORT ANTONIO AND THEIR EXPECTATIONS ARE FOR A ROAD THAT REPRESENTS BEST PRACTICE AND IS BUILT AT INTERNATIONAL STANDARD.

MR. SPEAKER, I BEG TO BE ALLOWED ALSO TO THANK WHOLEHEARTEDLY MY FAMILY, MY POLITICAL TEAM, MY PARTY, MY SUPPORTERS AND ESPECIALLY THE VOTERS WHO SUPPORTED ME.

MR. SPEAKER, ST. THOMAS AS A WHOLE HAS CONTINUED TO BE AFFECTED BY SOME EXTREME WEATHER SYSTEMS.

RECENTLY, THE HEAVY RAINS WHICH AFFECTED THE PARISH, CAUSED MILLIONS OF DOLLARS OF PROPERTY AND INFRASTRUCTURAL DAMAGE, INJURIES AND AT LEAST ONE FATALITY.

MR SPEAKER, ON BEHALF OF ALL OF US I SHOULD LIKE TO OFFER ONCE AGAIN OUR CONDOLENCES TO THE FAMILY OF THAT STUDENT WHOSE FUNERAL I ATTENDED LAST SATURDAY, AND OUR SYMPATHIES TO THOSE WHO WERE INJURED AND OUR COMMISERATIONS WITH THOSE WHO SUFFERED OTHER LOSSES AND DAMAGE.

ON BEHALF OF THE PEOPLE I OFFER THEIR THANKS TO THE MINISTRIES OF WORKS, LOCAL GOVERNMENT, AGRICULTURE AND LABOUR AND SOCIAL SECURITY, WHICH HAVE MADE LEVELS OF INTERVENTIONS SO FAR.

FACT IS, MR. SPEAKER THAT THE SUPPORT FROM GOVERNMENT THOUGH HIGHLY APPRECIATED MUST GO SIGNIFICANTLY BEYOND THE PRESENT EFFORTS.

PRESENTATION OF 2015/2016

MR SPEAKER, IN 2015/ 2016, THE HON. DERRICK KELLIER IN HIS PRESENTATION TO THE HOUSE HIGHLIGHTED A NUMBER OF ACHIEVEMENTS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL SECURITY, AND I OFFER MY THANKS TO HIM AND THE HARD WORKING STAFF OF THE MINISTRY, DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES.

IN MY OWN TIME THERE AS THE MINISTER, AMONG OTHER THINGS I SOUGHT TO CONTINUE THOSE PROGRAMMES, POLICIES AND PROJECTS, AND IN THE PROVERBIAL LANGUAGE I SHOULD SAY - "WITHOUT DROPPING THE BALL"; (AND SINCE WE ARE WORLD RENOWNED FOR TRACK AND FIELD), I WOULD AMEND THAT TO SAY "WITHOUT DROPPING THE BATON".

MR. SPEAKER, THE TIME CONSTRAINTS, HOWEVER, DO NOT ALLOW FOR A VAST TREATISE, BUT IN THE TIME PROVIDED I WISH TO DEAL WITH THE QUESTIONS OF:

- a) THE OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH BILL (OSHA)
- b) LABOUR MARKET REFORM AND LABOUR MARKET INFORMATION SYSTEM
- c) OVERSEAS EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME
- d) MINIMUM WAGE

SOCIAL PROTECTION

- e) PENSIONERS
- f) NIS AND NIF
- g) PATH
- h) THE COMMUNITY OF JAMAICAN SENIOR CITIZENS
- i) THE COMMUNITY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

OSHA

MR. SPEAKER, ONE RECENT INCIDENT IN WESTERN JAMAICA AT AN INDUSTRIAL SITE HAS RAISED INTO SHARP RELIEF THE QUESTION OF OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH. THIS IS NOT A MATTER OF APPORTIONING BLAME, WHICH WOULD BE UNWORTHY OF THIS DEBATE, RATHER IT INVOLVES THE QUESTION OF MOVING WITH UNIFIED PURPOSE TOWARD THE PROMULGATION OF THIS ACT.

AND SO MR. SPEAKER, THE QUESTION OF THE MOMENT IS; WHEN WILL THE OSHA BILL BE BROUGHT TO PARLIAMENT FOR ITS CONSIDERATION?

I HESITATE TO GO FURTHER AT THIS TIME FOR TWO REASONS.

FIRST THE PROPOSAL HAS HAD THE BENEFIT OF THE BEST MINDS ON BOTH SIDES OF THIS HOUSE, AND BROAD CONSENSUS HAS BEEN REACHED WITH NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS CONCERNING THE WAY FORWARD.

I CAN BOLDLY SAY, AND I KNOW THAT THE MINISTER WILL AGREE, THAT HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR THE INTERVENTION OF A CERTAIN EVENT LATE IN THE PAST LEGISLATIVE YEAR THAT THE MATTER WOULD HAVE BEEN MUCH FURTHER ADVANCED EVEN TO PASSAGE.

SECOND, MR. SPEAKER, MY HESITANCY ARISES FROM THE GREAT MATTER OF THE SOVEREIGNTY OF PARLIAMENT.

FOR EVEN THOUGH WE HAVE BROAD BI- PARTISAN CONSENSUS AT COMMITTEE AND OTHER LEVELS, I AM STILL MINDFUL THAT PARLIAMENT HAS THE POWER AND AUTHORITY TO REJECT, AND SO I WOULD NOT WISH TO PREEMPT.

SO I REPEAT, WHAT IS THE TIME TABLE FOR BRINGING THE DRAFT BILL TO PARLIAMENT?

I WISH TO REMIND THIS HONOURABLE HOUSE THAT THE ACT IS A MOST NECESSARY TOOL FOR ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY IN OUR INVESTMENT DRIVE TOWARD THE NEW ECONOMY (AND PRIME MINISTER YOU SHOULD BE PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN THIS ,

BECAUSE IT IS OF VITAL IMPORTANCE IN ANY MENU FOR PROSPERITY), AND IS A NECESSARY PILLAR IN THE ARCHITECTURE OF INDUSTRIAL HEALTH AND SAFETY.

I SAY TO THE MINISTER OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL SECURITY, THIS IS ONE BATON YOU CANNOT AFFORD TO DROP; AND THIS IS ONE RACE IN WHICH WE ARE COMPETING AGAINST TIME AND THE COUNTRY CANNOT AFFORD TO BE LATE.

LABOUR MARKET REFORM

MR. SPEAKER, THE REFORM OF THE LABOUR MARKET IS AN ONGOING EXERCISE. I THINK THAT WE ALL ACCEPT THAT WHEN WE SPEAK OF LABOUR MARKET REFORM WE ARE DESCRIBING AN ONGOING PROCESS RATHER THAN A DESTINATION.

THE MAIN OBJECTIVE OF THE REFORM IS THE OUTFITTING OF THE LABOUR MARKET TO ATTAIN AND FUNCTION AT ILO BENCHMARKED BEST PRACTICES.

THIS IS WHY THE LABOUR MARKET REFORM COMMISSION MANDATE RESTS ON FIVE FUNDAMENTAL PILLARS;

1. PRODUCTIVITY, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY
2. INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS
3. EDUCATION AND TRAINING
4. LABOUR POLICIES AND LEGISLATION
5. SOCIAL PROTECTION

AND SO MR. SPEAKER, I PUT THIS QUESTION WHAT IS HAPPENING WITH THE WORK OF THE LABOUR MARKET REFORM COMMISSION? HAVE WE NOW FOUND A PERMANENT REPLACEMENT FOR LLOYD GOODLEIGH, THE COORDINATOR WHO DIED LAST YEAR?

MR. SPEAKER, THE RELATIVE CALM IN THE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS ENVIRONMENT CANNOT BE PRESUMED TO LAST FOR EVER.

I CALL IT A FRAGILE TRUCE!

LABOUR MARKET INFORMATION SYSTEM

MR. SPEAKER, I TURN TO THE MATTER OF LABOUR MARKET INFORMATION SYSTEM. THE PREVIOUS ADMINISTRATION HAD ENSURED THAT THE LMIS WAS UP AND RUNNING, ONE OUTCOME OF WHICH WAS THAT PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES WERE ENGAGING IN CYBERSPACE.

BUT IT GOES BEYOND MERE ENGAGEMENT; LMIS IT IS A TOOL FOR PREDICTING LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL TRENDS IN THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET SPACE AND FORMULATING ADEQUATE RESPONSES IN THE LABOUR MARKET TO MEET THOSE DEMANDS, AND AS SUCH IT IS AN EXCELLENT TOOL FOR FRAMING TRAINING NEEDS.

WHAT IS THE LMIS SAYING TO THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION ABOUT TRAINING NEEDS FOR EMPLOYMENT IN THE NEW KNOWLEDGE BASED ECONOMY OF THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

WHAT ARE THE JOBS AND HOW MANY WILL BE AVAILABLE AND ON WHAT TIME LINES?

OVERSEAS EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME

MR. SPEAKER, THE OVERSEAS EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME MUST BE POSITIONED MORE TO CENTER-STAGE IN OUR ECONOMIC PROGRAMME.

WE ARE ALL AGREED THAT IT IS MORE THAN SEASONAL FARM, HOTEL AND SEMI-SKILLED WORKERS TO THE USA AND CANADA. WE MUST BE LOOKING WIDER AFIELD!

HOW WILL BREXIT AFFECT JAMAICAN MIGRANTS?

I AM SAYING DON'T WAIT FOR THE FALLOUT – BEGIN A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE FOREIGN MINISTRIES (TO BE ELEVATED AT THE APPROPRIATE TIME TO HEADS OF GOVERNMENT) ON SECURITY OF

TENURE; BUT ALSO ON THE POSSIBILITY OF ENGAGING JAMAICAN WORKERS ON PROJECTS THAT MIGHT DEVELOP AS A RESULT OF AN INWARD PULL OF THE BRITISH ECONOMY.

AND, MR. SPEAKER WHILST WE GO TO GREAT BRITAIN, CONCURRENTLY, WE OUGHT TO BE LOOKING AT CARICOM.

THE RECENT SHANIQUE MYRIE JUDGEMENT OF THE CARIBBEAN COURT OF JUSTICE HAS MEANING BEYOND THE STRICT WORDING OF THE JUDGEMENT.

TRUTH IS MR. SPEAKER, SOME OF OUR CARIBBEAN PARTNERS HAVE A DEMAND FOR SKILLS THAT ARE NOT EASILY AVAILABLE "IN BORDER" AND OTHERS SUCH AS JAMAICA HAVE A SURPLUS OF SKILLS "IN BORDER", WHICH WE HAVE TO MARRY WITH THE DEMAND.

THE PLAYOUT MUST MOVE FROM THE GLARE OF THE PUBLIC MEDIA TO THE TABLES OF THE CONFERENCE ROOMS, WITH THE PUBLIC MEDIA FAITHFULLY UPDATING THE PUBLIC AND ACTING AS WATCHDOG FOR FAIRNESS.

IT IS A WIN-WIN SITUATION AND I AM CALLING ON THE GOVERNMENT TO GET GOING ON THAT FRONT.

MR SPEAKER I AM STRONGLY RECOMMENDING TO THE MINISTER AND HER ABLE PERMANENT SECRETARY AND HER TEAM TO HAVE A SPECIAL RECRUITMENT FOR THE FIFTEEN HUNDRED WORKERS FOR THE US MARKET INSTEAD OF JUST USING THOSE RECRUITED FOR THE CANADIAN PROGRAMME.

MR. SPEAKER, I ALSO CALL ON THE MINISTER TO CONTINUE TO DO MEDICALS FOR ALL OVERSEAS WORK PROGRAMME BECAUSE THIS REPRESENTS BEST PRACTICE AND INSPITE OF THE COSTS, GIVES JAMAICA A COMPETITIVE EDGE AMONG WORKERS FROM OTHER COUNTRIES AND THEREFORE IS A WORTHWHILE INVESTMENT.

MR SPEAKER IN MY MEETINGS WITH OVERSEAS EMPLOYERS THESE CALLS WERE AT THE TOP OF THEIR AGENDA.

MINIMUM WAGE

MR. SPEAKER, WHEN THE MINIMUM WAGE ORDER WAS BEING DEBATED IN THE HOUSE, AS THE RESPONSIBLE MINISTER, I POINTED OUT THAT THE RECOMMENDATION FOR AN INCREASE AND THE LEVEL OF THAT INCREASE WERE THE RESULT OF INTENSIVE NEGOTIATIONS AND SUBMISSIONS FROM OVER ELEVEN ORGANIZATIONS INCLUDING THE TRADE UNIONS, THE EMPLOYERS FEDERATION, JAMAICA SECURITY GUARDS ASSOCIATION, BUREAU OF WOMEN'S AFFAIRS, AND OTHER STAKE HOLDERS.

THE RECOMMENDATION WAS ALWAYS A CONSENSUAL ONE WITH A LITTLE GIVE AND TAKE FROM ALL SIDES IN THE INTEREST OF REDUCING INFLATION AND ACCELERATING GROWTH IN THE ECONOMY.

IN THE END, THE COMMISSION, AMONG OTHER THINGS CALLED FOR THE RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF THE JOINT INDUSTRIAL COUNCIL FOR SECURITY GUARDS.

I AM FULLY IN SUPPORT OF THAT RECOMMENDATION MR. SPEAKER AND IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THE MINISTER ENSURES THAT THE NECESSARY PROCESSES ARE UNDERTAKEN TO ENSURE THIS.

OUR SECURITY GUARDS HAVE WAITED LONG ENOUGH.

MR. SPEAKER, THE NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGE THEREFORE DOES NOT DESCRIBE THE **HIGHEST** WAGE AT WHICH A WORKER IS TO BE PAID; RATHER IT SETS BY LAW THE **BASE** WAGE PER HOUR OR PER WEEK. WAGES CANNOT BE ANY LESS, BUT THEY CAN BE HIGHER.

SOME EMPLOYERS WHO HAVE THE ABILITY TO PAY HAVE ALWAYS PAID THEIR EMPLOYEES ABOVE AND BEYOND, AND WE COMMEND THEM FOR THEIR ACTIONS IN THAT REGARD, AND WE ENCOURAGE OTHERS WHO HAVE THE ABILITY TO FOLLOW SUIT.

MR. SPEAKER, CERTAIN CAMPAIGN PROMISES ON MINIMUM WAGE, TO INCREASE IT BY 50%, HOWEVER, THREATEN TO DERAIL THE LONG HARD WON VICTORY OF INDUSTRIAL HARMONY, AND I OFFER SOME FRIENDLY ADVICE TO THE GOVERNMENT; BE CAREFUL NOT TO DROP A PROVERBIAL "FLY IN THE OINTMENT" OF THE RELATIVE INDUSTRIAL PEACE THAT NOW PREVAILS.

SOCIAL PROTECTION

PENSIONERS:

MR.SPEAKER, FUNDAMENTAL TO THE TAX MEASURES PROPOSED IN THE BUDGET AMONG OTHER THINGS, IS A TAX OF \$7 PER LITRE ON GAS THAT WILL ASSIST THE GOVERNMENT IN GENERATING INCOME TO OFFSET REVENUES THAT IT WILL GIVE UP FOR ITS EXEMPTION OF INDIVIDUALS EARNING JUST OVER JA\$1 MILLION. A COMMITMENT, WHICH WHEN MADE EARLIER THIS YEAR, WAS STATED TO BE REVENUE NEUTRAL. THESE TAX MEASURES ARE HAVING A DELETERIOUS EFFECT ON CITIZENS.

MR. SPEAKER, I AM TOLD THAT SELDOM DO WE GET ECONOMISTS TO ALL AGREE ON ANY ONE TOPIC; BUT ON THIS MATTER THE ECONOMISTS ARE ALL PREDICTING THAT THE “PASS-THROUGH” FROM THE SCT ON PETROL WILL RAISE EVERYTHING IN ITS PATH, AND THAT THOSE RESULTING PRICE INCREASES WILL AFFECT EVERYONE; BUT WILL DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECT THE MOST VULNERABLE. WHEN WE SPEAK OF THE MOST VULNERABLE MR. SPEAKER, WE ARE REFERRING TO SENIOR CITIZENS, PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, CHILDREN, AND THE OUTDOOR POOR AND AT RISK YOUTHS. BECAUSE OF THEIR PECULIARITIES, ANY INCREASE IN TAXES IS GOING TO NEGATIVELY IMPACT THEM. TAKE FOR EXAMPLE, MR.SPEAKER, THOSE WHO ARE EARNING A PENSION, WHETHER IT BE THE NIS OR THAT BEING PAID BY THE ADMINISTRATOR

GENERAL, IS FEELING A CHRONIC EFFECT FROM THESE TAXES AS THEY HAVE BEEN HAVING A TRICKLEDOWN EFFECT ON THE PRICE OF GOODS AND SERVICES. IN ALL OF THIS, THERE HAS BEEN NO ANNOUNCEMENT IN THE ADJUSTMENT OF PENSIONS FOR PENSIONERS DURING THE BUDGET PRESENTATION.

MR. SPEAKER, HOW DOES THE GOVERNMENT PROPOSE TO PROTECT THAT PENSIONER FROM AMITY HALL, OR THAT FAMILY FROM SOHO, OR THE STUDENT FROM BREADNUT HILL WHO GET THE SAME AMOUNT OF MONEY FOR PENSION, THE SAME AMOUNT FOR LUNCH MONEY; BUT KEROSENE HAS INCREASED, CHICKEN-MEAT HAS INCREASED, AND INCIDENTALS AT SCHOOL HAVE INCREASED.

I AM THEREFORE MR. SPEAKER, CALLING FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO INCREASE THE PENSION FOR PENSIONERS ON BOTH THE NIS AND THE PENSION BEING PAID TO RETIRED CIVIL SERVANTS. IT IS BLATANTLY UNJUST FOR US TO IMPOSE THESE TAXES ON THESE FIXED INCOME EARNERS AND DO NOT CONSIDER AN INCREASE FOR THEIR PENSION.

NATIONAL INSURANCE SCHEME AND THE NATIONAL INSURANCE FUND

MR. SPEAKER, THE PENSIONS AND OTHER BENEFITS PAID BY THE NATIONAL INSURANCE SCHEME HAVE TO BE LOOKED AT WITH EVEN GREATER URGENCY FOR INCREASES IN LIGHT OF THE PRICE INCREASES WHICH ARE LIKELY TO ADVERSELY AFFECT THIS MARGINAL GROUP.

AN **NIS** PENSIONER THEREFORE, FACING HIGHER PRICES FOR THE BASKET OF BASIC GOODS AND NOT HAVING A CORRESPONDING INCREASE IN PENSION BENEFITS, MUST SLIDE DEEPER INTO POVERTY.

WE WITNESS THIS DAILY AS MP'S, WITH THE REQUESTS FOR SCHOOL AND OTHER TYPES OF ASSISTANCE; AND I CAN TELL YOU MR. SPEAKER, THAT WHILST I HAVE ALWAYS HAD THESE HUNDREDS OF REQUESTS EVERY YEAR, THE NUMBER AND DEGREE OF THE NEEDS HAVE WORSENERED IN THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS; WHICH PROMPTS TWO QUESTIONS:

MINISTER, WHAT ARE YOU DOING ABOUT INCREASING THE BENEFITS TO PENSIONERS?

AND WILL THESE BENEFITS BE AWARDED EFFECTIVE **APRIL 1, 2016**?

I AM SURE MANY IN THIS HOUSE REMEMBER THAT DATE, AS THE PROMISED TIME FOR SOME THINGS TO HAPPEN. IT WOULD BE GOOD FOR SOME GOOD THINGS TO HAPPEN FOR PENSIONERS, AND I AM PUTTING IT SQUARELY ON THE TABLE MR. SPEAKER.

MR. SPEAKER, WE HAD IN PLACE THE BEST MANAGEMENT TEAM AND ACTUARIAL SUPPORT FOR THE NATIONAL INSURANCE FUND THAT ANYONE COULD EVER SOURCE, AND THEIR INVESTMENT PORTFOLIOS SUPPORT THIS CLAIM INSPITE OF THE CHALLENGES.

MR. SPEAKER, I AM AWARE OF THE ACTUARIAL STUDY OF THE NIS AND CONCERNS THAT HAVE BEEN RAISED IN RELATION TO SUSTAINABILITY BUT I DO BELIEVE THAT WITH A PRUDENT BOARD WITH A FIXITY OF PURPOSE THAT MATTER CAN BE RESOLVED.

HOWEVER MR. SPEAKER I MUST EXPRESS MY DEEP CONCERN AS IT RELATES TO SOME MEMBERS OF THE NEWLY APPOINTED BOARD OF THE NIF AND I HAVE ASKED FOR A MEETING WITH THE MINISTER TO COMMUNICATE THIS BECAUSE I DO NOT BELIEVE IT SHOULD BE DISCUSSED IN THE PUBLIC SPACE AT THIS TIME. I THEREFORE LOOK FORWARD TO MEETING WITH THE MINISTER VERY SOON AS THIS IS A MATTER OF GREAT URGENCY.

PATH

SIMULTANEOUSLY MR. SPEAKER, INDIVIDUALS ON SOCIAL PROGRAMMES SUCH AS THE PROGRAMME OF ADVANCEMENT THROUGH HEALTH AND EDUCATION, ARE SEEING A REDUCTION IN THE PURCHASING POWER OF THE STIPEND THAT THEY RECEIVE. MR. SPEAKER, THERE IS JUST OVER 380,000 INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE ON THE PATH, OF WHICH 71% ARE

CHILDREN. IN THE DEBATE ON THE BUDGET, THE MOST HON. PRIME MINISTER POINTED OUT THAT PATH WILL SEE AN INCREASE OF \$520 MILLION DURING THIS FINANCIAL YEAR. A CRUDE MATHEMATICAL CALCULATION TELLS ME THAT THIS WILL AVERAGE APPROXIMATELY \$1,250.00 PER BENEFICIARY FOR THE ENTIRE YEAR. THIS WILL WORK OUT TO ABOUT A MEAGRE \$100 PER MONTH FOR EACH BENEFICIARY. MR. SPEAKER, \$100 PER MONTH PER BENEFICIARY AND THESE PERSONS ARE SEEING INCREASES IN BUS FARES, FOOD PRICE, ELECTRICITY, CLOTHING AND OTHER SUCH BASIC NECESSITIES. THIS IS PLACING FURTHER PRESSURE ON THESE VULNERABLE CITIZENS AND IS HAVING DIRE CONSEQUENCES ON THEM. I WANT TO SUGGEST TO THE GOVERNMENT THAT THERE BE AN UPWARD REVISION OF THIS FIGURE SO THAT IT WILL ENABLE PATH BENEFICIARIES TO BE MORE RESPONSIVE TO THE SHOCKS BROUGHT ON BY THESE TAX MEASURES.

MR. SPEAKER, RECENTLY THERE HAS BEEN PUBLIC CONCERNS AS TO THE ALLOCATION TO THE PATH DURING THIS FINANCIAL YEAR. IT HAS BEEN INCORRECTLY REPORTED THAT THERE HAS BEEN A REDUCTION IN THE ALLOCATION TO PATH. HOWEVER, IT MUST BE POINTED OUT THAT WHAT IS HAPPENING MR. SPEAKER, IS THAT THERE IS A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF BENEFICIARIES WHO ARE NOT ADHERING TO THE CONDITIONS OF THE PROGRAMME. BUT EQUALLY, MR. SPEAKER, PATH DOES NOT HAVE SUFFICIENT SOCIAL WORKERS TO DO THE NECESSARY CASE MANAGEMENT OF BENEFICIARIES. THE PROGRAMME REQUIRES THAT THERE BE REGULAR VISITS TO BENEFICIARIES, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO ARE IN BREACH OF THE CONDITIONS UNDER THE PROGRAMME. THERE ARE JUST NOT ENOUGH SOCIAL WORKERS TO DO THE CASE MANAGEMENT AND THIS IS CONTRIBUTING TO THE HIGH LEVELS OF NON-COMPLIANCE UNDER THE PROGRAMME. THERE ARE LESS THAN 200 SOCIAL WORKERS ON THE

ENTIRE PATH INITIATIVE. THIS CONSTITUTES AN AVERAGE OF 1,900 BENEFICIARIES PER SOCIAL WORKER AND THIS IS INTOLERABLE MR. SPEAKER. THERE IS THEREFORE AN URGENT NEED FOR MORE SOCIAL WORKERS TO BE EMPLOYED TO PATH SO THEY CAN BE MORE RESPONSIVE TO THE DEMANDS OF THE BENEFICIARIES. MORE FUNDS MUST BE ALLOCATED TO THE PATH TO DEAL WITH THE EMPLOYMENT OF SOCIAL WORKERS OR ELSE WE WILL CONTINUE TO HAVE A HIGH NON-COMPLIANCE AMONG BENEFICIARIES. THERE ARE APPROXIMATELY 63,000 BENEFICIARIES WHO ARE DEEMED NON-COMPLIANT UNDER THE PROGRAMME. THIS IS ABOUT 20% OF THE TOTAL BENEFICIARIES UNDER PATH AND THERE MUST BE AN URGENCY TO ADDRESS THIS.

SENIOR CITIZENS

MR. SPEAKER, OUR SENIOR CITIZENS ARE EXTREMELY SPECIAL CITIZENS. THESE ARE INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE TOILED AND LABOURED FOR THIS COUNTRY AND WE OWE THEM A DEBT OF GRATITUDE. WE MUST ENSURE THAT THEY ARE COMFORTABLE IN THEIR SENIOR YEARS. WE MUST ENSURE THAT THEY ARE RESPECTED AND TREATED WITH THE DIGNITY THAT THEY DESERVE. I WANT TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO APPEAL TO THE MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY, TO TREAT THEM WITH ABSOLUTE RESPECT IN THEIR COMMUNITIES. MAKE SURE THAT WHATSOEVER ASSISTANCE THAT CAN BE RENDERED TO THEM, BE GIVEN SO THAT THEY CAN BE COMFORTABLE AND HAPPY. MR. SPEAKER, I WANT TO APPEAL TO THE GOVERNMENT TO ENSURE THAT ADEQUATE RESOURCES ARE PROVIDED TO THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SENIOR

CITIZENS, TO EFFECTIVELY EXECUTE THEIR MANDATE TO PROVIDE SERVICES FOR OUR SENIOR CITIZENS.

COMMUNITY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

IT WOULD BE REMISS OF ME MR. SPEAKER, TO MAKE THIS PRESENTATION AND DO NOT MENTION ONE OF THE MOST VULNERABLE GROUPS WITHIN THE JAMAICAN SOCIETY. I SPEAK OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES. THESE ARE INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE BEING PROFOUNDLY IMPACTED AS INTIMATED IN THE IMF RELEASE ON MAY 20, 2016. I HAVE TO MENTION THIS GROUP IN PARTICULAR BECAUSE WE KNOW THAT THEY ARE PROBABLY THE MOST VULNERABLE OF THE VULNERABLE GROUPS. CENSUS 2001 SHOWED APPROXIMATELY 168,000 PERSONS HAVING DECLARED THAT THEY HAVE A DISABILITY. STATIN HOWEVER INDICATED THAT THIS FIGURE IS HIGHER BECAUSE THERE WERE INDIVIDUALS WHO DID NOT WANT TO DECLARE THAT THEY HAVE A DISABILITY BECAUSE OF THE STIGMA ASSOCIATED WITH PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE SOCIETY. THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION 2011 REPORT HAS HOWEVER ESTIMATED THAT BETWEEN 15-17% OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES POPULATION, CONSTITUTES PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AND THIS IS A MORE CREDIBLE ESTIMATE TO WORK WITH IN THE JAMAICAN CONTEXT. IT MEANS THAT APPROXIMATELY 400,000 PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES ARE LIVING IN THE ISLAND. HOWEVER, MR. SPEAKER, THIS GROUP OF VULNERABLE JAMAICANS IS NOT PROPORTIONALLY REPRESENTED ON THE PATH WHICH IS SUPPOSED TO BE CATERING TO THE POOREST OF THE POOR. DATA FROM THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SURVEY OF JAMAICA 2015 IS POINTING TO JUST OVER 13,000 PERSONS WITH

DISABILITIES ON THE PATH AND THIS CANNOT BE JUST. THERE MUST BE A SERIOUS RELOOK AT HOW PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES ARE TREATED WITH REGARDS TO THE PATH AND I AM CALLING UPON THE ADMINISTRATION TO REVISIT THE MECHANISM FOR SELECTING PERSONS ON THIS CRITICAL WELFARE PROGRAMME FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE. MR. SPEAKER, THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL SECURITY DID A SOCIO-ECONOMIC STUDY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE ISLAND IN 2015 AND JUST OVER 91% OF THE RESPONDENTS INDICATED THAT THEY WERE UNEMPLOYED. THIS MR. SPEAKER, CORROBORATES WHAT MEMBERS IN THE COMMUNITY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES HAD SUSPECTED. IT THEREFORE MEANS THAT A VAST MAJORITY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES HAVE TO DEPEND ON THEIR FAMILIES OR THE STATE FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT. THIS BUDGET HAS NOTHING IN IT FOR THEM AND WE MUST CORRECT IT.

MR. SPEAKER, IN THE SHORT TIME THAT I SPENT AT THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL SECURITY, I ESTABLISHED THE NEW BOARD OF DIRECTORS FOR THE NEW JAMAICA COUNCIL FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES. THIS IS A REQUIREMENT OF THE NEW DISABILITIES ACT THAT WE PASSED IN 2014. THE APPOINTMENT OF THAT BOARD MR. SPEAKER WAS TO TRIGGER THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE VARIOUS PROVISIONS OF THE ACT. HOWEVER, MR. SPEAKER, SINCE THE NEW ADMINISTRATION, THE BOARD HAS BEEN DISSOLVED AND A NEW ONE IS YET TO BE APPOINTED. I AM THEREFORE CALLING UPON THE HONOURABLE MINISTER TO GIVE THIS SOME FOCUS AND APPOINT THE NEW BOARD OF DIRECTORS WITH ALACRITY, SO THAT WE CAN START IMPLEMENTING THE LEGISLATION.

MR. SPEAKER, I WANT TO MAKE SOME RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT TO DEAL WITH THESE VULNERABLE GROUPS.

1. THAT WE ADD ANOTHER \$1.5 BILLION TO PATH SO THAT BENEFICIARIES CAN GET MORE STIPEND AND MORE SOCIAL WORKERS BE EMPLOYED TO THE PROGRAMME.
2. WE REVISE THE BENEFICIARY IDENTIFICATION SYSTEM TO MAKE IT MORE RESPONSIVE TO VULNERABLE GROUPS SUCH AS PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES.
3. WE REVISE THE APPEALS COMMITTEES THAT HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED TO HEAR APPEALS FOR UNSUCCESSFUL PATH APPLICANTS.
4. WE PROVIDE MORE FUNDS TO THE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT GRANT IN THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL SECURITY SO THAT PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES CAN GAIN MORE GRANTS TO START THEIR OWN BUSINESS.
5. WE PROVIDE OUR PENSIONERS WITH A REASONABLE INCREASE SO THAT THEY CAN DEAL WITH THE ANTICIPATED FALLOUT FROM THESE TAX INCREASES.
6. THAT ALL PATH BENEFICIARIES WHO ARE ON THE NHF ARE FULLY EXEMPTED FROM PAYING FOR THEIR MEDICATION, WHETHER BE IT IN THE PUBLIC OR PRIVATE SECTOR.

CONCLUSION

MR. SPEAKER, OF ALL THE THINGS I HAVE SAID AND HAVE RAISED, ALL ARE ESSENTIAL AND ALL ARE IMPORTANT TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT. IT IS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT THAT THEY BE ADDRESSED AND ATTENDED TO WITH ALACRITY.

MR. SPEAKER, TRUTH IS, A NATION IS CONSIDERED MIGHTY BY THE FORCE OF ITS ARMS, AND THE REACH OF ITS BORDERS; BUT IT CAN ONLY BE CONSIDERED GREAT BY THE COMPASSION IT DEMONSTRATES FOR THE POOR, THE VULNERABLE AND THE LESS FORTUNATE.

WE WANT TO CONTINUE TO LIVE IN A GREAT COUNTRY, AND FOR OUR CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN TO BE PROUD OF OUR EFFORTS.

ON THIS SIDE WE PLEDGE TO MAKE JAMAICA THAT PLACE OF CHOICE TO LIVE , WORK , RAISE FAMILIES AND DO BUSINESS.

GOD BLESS US ALL.

GOD BLESS JAMAICA, LAND WE LOVE.