

Highlights of the Prime Minister's 2024/25 Budget Presentation

Prime Minister the Most Hon. Andrew Holness announced a number of initiatives during his contribution to the 2024/25 Budget Debate in the House of Representatives on March 21.

Minimum Wage Increased



Prime Minister, the Most Hon. Andrew Holness, makes his contribution to the 2024/25 Budget Debate in the House of Representatives on March 21.

THE NATIONAL minimum wage will be increased from \$13,000 to \$15,000 per 40-hour workweek effective June 1, 2024, representing a 15 per cent increase.

Prime Minister the Most Hon. Andrew Holness made the announcement during his contribution to the 2024/25 budget debate in the House of Representatives on March 21.

"We had also signalled last year that we intended to do away with this business of having different minimum wages for our industrial security guards and everyone else. The minimum wage for industrial security guards will move from \$14,000 per week to \$15,000 per week and this

will take effect from June 1, 2024," he said.

The Prime Minister stated that the Government thought about the adjustment very carefully and decided it was necessary to do so to keep the working class and the poorest abreast with inflation.

"We have to look out for the poor and most vulnerable in the society. There is certainly, on the lower ends of the society in terms of the working poor, real challenges. So, in presenting this budget, we looked at how we can support every sector of the society, and I believe the budget presented has touched almost every sector of the society," Mr. Holness said.

A similar announcement was made last year when the minimum wage was increased from \$9,000 to \$13,000 per 40-hour

workweek, while the minimum wage for industrial security guards moved from \$10,500 per week to \$14,000.



Prime Minister the Most Hon. Andrew Holness (centre) and Government Members of Parliament make their way to Gordon House ahead of his contribution to the 2024/2025 Budget Debate on March 21.

\$2.5 Billion for Cleaning Gullies, Drains and Roadways

A SUM of \$2.5 billion has been earmarked for the cleaning of major gullies, drains and roadways across Jamaica.

"As we seek to upgrade road corridors, we recognise the ongoing need for waste management, debushing and maintenance throughout the year. Jamaica is a naturally beautiful place, but our country is being "uglified" by plastics and other forms of waste on

our roadways and in our gullies and drains," Prime Minister the Most Hon. Andrew Holness said.

The Prime Minister said that an important element of the project is the employment of persons to do the cleaning, who will also be able to earn additional income from selling the plastic containers collected to the recycling entities.

"I have had dialogue with Recycling Partners of

Jamaica, who have an amazing system of purchasing and recycling plastic. We are incentivising cleaning and beautification through recycling," Mr. Holness said.

Meanwhile, an additional \$1 billion is to be dedicated to rural water systems for the upcoming 2024/25 Financial Year.

Mr. Holness said the significant investment is intended to meet the need

for the resource by communities in rural Jamaica, many of which are not National Water Commission (NWC) customers.

Some of the proposed projects for the Financial Year 2024/25 are: Riversdale in St. Catherine North Eastern, at a cost of \$53 million; Spring Gardens, St. James Southern, \$19 million; and Maroon Town in St. James Southern, \$53.2 million.



A section of the newly-rehabilitated Whithorn to Darliston roadway in Westmoreland.

Trust Fund for Under-Privileged Children to be Established

CHILDREN BORN on or after the 60th anniversary of Jamaica's independence, who are wards of the State or beneficiaries of the Programme of Advancement Through Health and Education (PATH), will be eligible for the Jamaica 60 HOPE (Hope, Opportunity, Prosperity and Empowerment) For Children Trust Fund.

Jamaica celebrated its Diamond Jubilee on August 6, 2022.

Prime Minister the Most Hon. Andrew Holness said the purpose of the Fund is to help to close the wealth gap and address the issue of intergenerational poverty by creating a trust account specifically catered to vulnerable children.

"The HOPE for Children Trust Fund will provide each eligible child with a long-term savings account funded through annual contributions

from the Government. Parents, guardians or other donors will also be able to make deposits into the account for the future benefit of any specific child," Mr. Holness said.

The accumulated funds, including interest, will be accessible on or after the child's 18th birthday, for specific purposes such as education, purchase of a home or commercial property or investment in a business.

"The central idea behind the programme is to provide children with a lump sum to start them in life upon attaining adulthood. Our initial target is a lump sum of between \$600,000 and \$800,000, to be available on the 18th birthday of any eligible child," he said.

The Prime Minister noted that the Government will also explore alternatives to establish and manage the Fund.

Revised NHT Home Improvement Loan Policy

EFFECTIVE JULY 1, 2024, the National Housing Trust (NHT) will revise its Home Improvement Loan policy to allow all contributors to access home improvement loans of up to \$3.5 million after 10 years.

Prime Minister the Most Hon. Andrew Holness said as more Jamaicans become homeowners, there has been an increased demand for home improvement financing.

"Currently public sector workers enjoy a special benefit which allows for access to a home improvement loan from the NHT 10 years after the initial mortgage (loan). For non-public sector worker contributors, the time to access the loan is 15 years," he disclosed.

Additionally, he said, as of July 1, 2024, NHT contributors will be able to access a new loan product — the Smart Energy Home Improvement Loan.

This will enable contributors to outfit their dwellings with any combination of solar panels and batteries, solar water heaters, solar insulation, other renewable energy technology-windmills, hydropower, and biomass rainwater harvesting and storage, to include water tanks and pumps. He added that the assets must have a useful life that meets or exceeds the loan term.

He pointed out that contributors may access up to \$1.5 million with two contributors being able to join and access \$1.5 million each for the green energy home improvement at a rate of 5 per cent with a pay-back period of up to 10 years.

Additionally, in the coming fiscal year, the NHT will expand its Home Grants to include the installation of solar panel systems on the houses of public sector pensioners, at a maximum of \$1.5 million each.

Housing Solutions for Low-Income Contributors

THE NATIONAL Housing Trust (NHT) is projecting to commence construction of 15,009 housing solutions across the island during the upcoming fiscal year, which begins April 1.

Prime Minister the Most Hon. Andrew Holness said that more than 96 per cent of the solutions are geared toward lower middle income to low-income contributors.

He said that the move is in keeping with a policy

directive by the Government to the NHT Board three years ago.

"There are a few legacy projects which we were committed to ... and those projects will continue, but we are not taking on any new project that is outside of the policy guideline for low-income to lower middle income contributors," he explained.

The solutions will comprise 4,309 two-bedroom solutions, priced at an

average below \$13 million; 7,600 one-bedroom units, priced at an average below \$10 million; and 3,100 serviced lots, priced below \$4 million.

Meanwhile, housing completions continue to be challenged by supply chain disruptions, contractor delays, quality assurance issues and approval delays and shortage of labour.

To this end, Mr. Holness said the NHT will provide the opportunity for

Housing Opportunity, Production and Employment (HOPE) Programme participants to develop their skills and experience and become certified in construction.

The NHT will build out the programme with the HEART/NSTA Trust by creating an on-the-job training environment with development partners and aid in the provision of safety equipment, small tools and other learning aids.



Prime Minister the Most Hon. Andrew Holness (centre) is surrounded by new homeowners in the National Housing Trust Shrewsbury Housing Development phase two, in Petersfield, Westmoreland.

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