

OPENING REMARKS

Mr. Speaker, Woodrow Wilson, the 28th President (1913-1921) of the USA, once said (1910):

“The future is not for parties ‘playing politics’, but for measures conceived in the largest spirit, pushed by parties whose leaders are statesmen, not demagogues, who love, not their offices, but their duty and the opportunity for service”

Mr. Speaker, as a consequence of the gas riots in April 1999, out of a great concern as to where this country was going, out of a great concern as to what would be the future of Jamaica and hence my children, I was fortunate enough to be part of a group of concerned citizens who decided that it was about time Civil Society took a bold step and got more involved in the affairs of our country. Not as a political organisation, but as a pure citizen action group, seeking to be partakers in the moulding of the future of our country.

It is out of a desire to build a better country for all Jamaicans, it is out of a desire to contribute towards a more equitable society for my children, it is out of a desire to ensure that as a Nation we can once and for all show the world that, as a people, we are leaders in our own right, and we can make it right.... It is out of that desire that I am here today in this Honourable House.

Mr. Speaker, I stand here today a humble man. I have the privilege of being a member of this Honourable House of Representatives, a privilege I can assure you I do not take for granted.

And why I say this. To be sent to Parliament by the people, to take care of the business of our Nation in general, and of their constituency in particular, is one of tremendous responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, the road less travelled is a tough and challenging one. When you engage in a process by which your objective is to gain the support of the people you hope to represent, in other words, when your political path is one that is built from the bottom to the top, the sacrifices are many, and the challenges never ending. I have entered the political arena with the trust I have put in my people and with the principles of good representation as my guideline. It has been a road that has required many sacrifices, and I must thank, as I do everyday, the Almighty for having blessed me in so many ways.

Mr. Speaker, I have been blessed with a wonderful family; today I pay tribute to my wonderful and everlasting supportive wife, and my three children. Today I also pay tribute to my parents and my grandparents, in particular my Mother, who all played a critical role in my upbringing, moulding me into who I am today. And may I make special mention of my grandfather Gerald Mair, who also served this Parliament, in the Senate, and who I know would be very proud to see me here today. Mr. Speaker, I have been blessed with a wonderful staff and amazing

partners in my Company. They have all given me full and unconditional support in my quest to be elected to this Honourable House. Without my family, my partners and my staff it would not have been possible. Mr. Speaker, I have been blessed, I have been blessed by the Almighty to have been born in this wonderful country of ours, Jamaica land we love.

The road less travelled has not been an easy one, but I must say it has been fulfilling and one well worth while; it is a journey that started nine years ago, and has evolved from lobbying groups into politics and has taken me to be Member of Parliament, representing the wonderful people of North East St. Catherine.

Mr. Speaker, I could not close my opening remarks without thanking Generation 2000 and the workers of the Jamaica Labour Party, that noble institution of which I have the privilege of being a member of. To my runners, outdoor agents, indoor agents, supervisors, to my councillors, management team and organizer, I salute you today and praise you for the sacrifices you have made. To my constituents, thank you for the trust you have put in me. Rest assured that I will work hard and try my best to ensure that, with each year that passes by, your standard of living will improve.

NORTH EAST ST CATHERINE

Mr. Speaker, the people of NESC have been neglected for a very, very long time. Whether by coincidence or design, the fact is that they have not had the attention that every constituency deserves, and nevertheless are still willing to put their trust in their elected representative. It speaks volumes to the nature of my people, who although betrayed in the past, are still willing to work with me in the building of a better future for NESC.

Piped Water

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to piped water, whether you believe it or not, twenty years ago the people of NESC had more piped water than they have today. The lack of planning, the lack of proper maintenance, the lack of good representation, the lack of attention from the Government, has guaranteed the slowly, but surely, deterioration of all the water systems in the constituency.

The NWC and Parish Council water plants have been totally neglected. Districts like Bonnett, Jambos Pond, Hampshire, Cocoa Walk, Troja, Golden Grove, Pear Tree Grove, Mangrove, Facey, have not had piped water for years if not decades. This does not include the many Districts that have never had piped water at all. As a matter of fact, the only district in the entire constituency that has water at an acceptable basis is Mountain Pass. This, Mr. Speaker, eloquently demonstrates the desperate situation my constituents are in.

Since my election I have taken on this challenge with determination. The Pear Tree Grove water system that was completed 6 years ago but had not been commissioned, whether by coincidence or design, is now up and running, with the kind support of the St. Catherine Parish Council and JSIF; the Redwood water system, which had been commissioned but had not put one drop of water in the pipelines, is now up and running with the kind help of the NWC; the water system of Cocoa Walk, which has not functioned for over 10 years, is presently being rehabilitated with the kind help of the Environmental Foundation of Jamaica and the Social Development Commission. Mr. Speaker I have been working!

I have toured the constituency on two occasions with the Rural Water Supply Agency, and am expecting them to present me this week with a plan to, in the first instance, rehabilitate the present water plants, and secondly a plan for expansion, so at the end of my first term, the lack of piped water will no longer be an issue in NESC. On this matter, I would like to thank the Minister of Water & Housing for his support and interest in the people of NESC. Mr. Speaker I have been working!

Roads

Mr. Speaker, on the matter of roads, NESC did not remember what the odour of asphalt was like until the last general elections, where “out of the blue” came a contractor to build the road into the District of Gobay. Prior to that no form of road equipment had been seen in NESC for years. Since my election we have nevertheless been able to have the NWA patch Devil’s Race Course, we are presently patching the road

from Big Road to Glengoffe, have cleared the road & drains from Glengoffe to Williamsfield, got the commitment from the Minister of Transport & Works to re-open the road from Gobay to Silent Hill, got the commitment from the Minister of State in the Ministry of Transport & Works to work with us and have the NWA patch and rehabilitate the roads from York Street to Cheesefield, Riversdale to Top Hill, and Pear Tree Grove to Post Road. And, may I add, we are presently awaiting the technical report from the NWA for the construction of the retaining walls urgently needed in Omeally and Bamboo's Ridge. And to both Ministers I give them thanks for their support. Mr. Speaker I have been working!

Health

Mr. Speaker, knowing that the health of my people is critical, I have prepared a report on the state and condition of the Guys Hill, Redwood, Riversdale, Troja and Glengoffe Health Centres. None of them have a medical doctor on a regular basis, nor do they have the necessary pharmaceuticals, and some structures, like the Riversdale Centre, are in a terrible condition. The report was presented to the Minister of Health today. I have appealed for his assistance, and he has agreed to work with us to get these Health Centres up to standard, because the Minister of Health realises that if we can treat patients at the primary level, it will take pressure off the Linstead and Spanish Town Hospitals. This remedy, in addition to the launch of the Free Health Care Policy, will be of tremendous relief to my people. And I would like to take the opportunity to commend the Minister of Health for the successful

implementation of Free Health Care; Minister, they said you couldn't do it, but guess what, you did. Hon. Minister, on behalf of the people of NESC I say to you and the Government, thank you.

Agriculture

Mr. Speaker, as you may be aware, NESC is a farming constituency. As a matter of fact it is not only 100% rural, it is the most rural in the Parish of St. Catherine. It is comprised of small farmers, small hardworking and committed farmers, but mostly in the mid age and senior age bracket. This is of great concern, because one of the challenges we face, is the high level of migration of our youth to the urban centres, as they do not see a future in agriculture.

With the present international food crisis, and hence the escalating price of food commodities, as a Nation we have a challenge, but also most importantly, we have an opportunity to put agriculture back on the map of Jamaica.

Agriculture, as an industry, represents 18.2% of the workforce in Jamaica, and contributes only 5.3% of the total real GDP; in comparison, for example to Construction that represents 10.4% of the employed labour workforce and contributes 10.7% to GDP, or Manufacturing, that employs 6.1% of the work force and contributes to over 12.5% of our GDP.

Mr. Speaker, Agriculture is one of the greatest employers of labour, and I am happy to see that our present Minister of Agriculture is determined to not only make it an interesting but also a feasible industry, modern

with technology and niche marketing. The new thrust will make Agriculture attractive to our young people.

The Minister of Agriculture toured and met with my farmers last month, and I am grateful to the Minister for allocating time, out of his busy schedule, for NESC. In his various presentations the Minister outlined to my farmers his vision for Agriculture: critical aspects, amongst others, of this new proposal will be the reconversion of RADA into a marketing and technical support arm of the Ministry to serve and support the small farmers. He also outlined the new paradigm, in which farmers will see green house farming as the option for the future, a paradigm in which new techniques and mix of crop will increase the yield of production and reduce the need of fertilizer and chemicals. The Minister additionally emphasised the need to improve on the proper management and coordination of information in-between his Ministry and Customs, to ensure that we do not import subsidized and/or under-invoiced produce, so we can guarantee a competitive platform of equal opportunity for all. I am looking forward to this new vision.

Mr. Speaker, in the interim, I have been working closely with RADA and the JAS in order to give assistance to the farmers. Their needs are tremendous, and we are doing our best to help them. Mr. Speaker, may I take the opportunity to say that RADA and JAS have been extremely cooperative in these challenging times for our farmers, and I wish today to thank them for their continued support.

Crime

Mr. Speaker, crime is at worrying levels, and as you are aware, a peaceful and quiet District in my Constituency known as Gobay came under heavy scrutiny by the media and the nation towards the end of last year when eleven persons were murdered, under different circumstances, but within a time frame of only two months. The majority of the residents left and moved out of the District. This level of brutality had never been seen in NESC, and required immediate intervention in order to ensure that “it was cauterized and healed before it became an infection”. A process of social intervention was immediately taken in partnership with the Police, the Social Development Commission, the NWA and most importantly with the citizens of Gobay.

Mr. Speaker, amongst others things, we first of all had the NWA complete the construction of the road into Gobay, which had come to a halt since the general election. The SDC then organised a day in which Government agencies (i.e. RGD, PC Bank, RADA) were invited into the community to provide their particular service to the residents. On Labour Day we not only engaged in projects to enhance the community, but we also invited a Medical Doctor who, free of charge, attended to all the residents in the area. As I previously mentioned, we have received the commitment of the Minister of Transport & Works to reopen the road from Gobay to Silent Hill; this is a move that has been approved by the Police and the citizens, as it will now ensure that access to Gobay from Glengoffe is possible, specially for quick access by the Glengoffe Police; it will also allow the citizens of Gobay to now easily travel to Glengoffe and Kingston; it will create an opportunity for economic development as

the farmers will have clear and viable options of access to various markets. To the Hon. Minister of Transport & Works, on behalf of the people of Gobay, thank you once again!

Mr. Speaker, the bottom line is that Gobay is now peaceful, safe, and the majority of the residents have now returned to their homes. It was a joint effort of all interested parties, and proved that once there is a will, it can be done.

I say this, because we have been living under the scourge of crime for many years, and people are getting desperate and feeling hopeless.

So the question is what are we going to do? Everybody is pointing fingers at each other for solving the present level of crime!

It is time that ALL of us in this Honourable House hold ourselves accountable, we are the ones the people have sent here to take care of their business and hence we MUST provide the leadership to get rid of this “growing cancer” once and for all. To solve this problem more than treatment, what is needed is surgery!

Mr. Speaker, **it is about time the Police** face the fact that they have a serious problem when it comes to Human Rights. Crime cannot be solved without intelligence, and intelligence will not be forthcoming until the people trust the Police Force. That is a given! Therefore the onus is on the Police to rebuild that relationship, to earn back that trust, by respecting people as they expect themselves to be respected. The onus is on the Police to lead and to clean up the Force, and get rid of the rogue cops, because whether they accept it or not, the reality is that criminality has infiltrated their organisation. And therefore I call on the good and decent men and women in the Police Force, who are the vast

majority of the members, I call on you today, to take a stand in the name of Jamaica Land we love. Stand up for what is right, and make the Jamaica Constabulary Force once again the respected and noble institution it ought to be! Bring back the days of “when you looked at a Police officer and you feel not only secure but you feel proud”.

Mr. Speaker, **it is about time the Government** lead with determination and put in place not only the resources, but the policies and the legislation that will facilitate and empower the Police, Government Agencies and the Citizens, so that we all can come together and provide meaningful and effective leadership. The Government has so far, amongst others, tabled in Parliament (1) An Act to Amend the Coroners Act, (2) An Act to Amend the Constitution of Jamaica to provide for a Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, (3) An Act to repeal the Police Public Complaint Act and replace it with the Independent Commission of Investigations and (4) A green paper on The Whistleblower Legislation. And I congratulate them for the initiative. But what I would mostly like to see from the Government is a comprehensive legislative and infrastructural programme that will address the well needed reform of the Justice System. We need not reinvent the wheel, as there are many reports that have been produced over the years, most recently the Jamaican Justice System Reform Task Force report, which was presented to the Government in June of last year, a report that has a comprehensive analysis of the Judicial System, and makes very important recommendations, including a 10 year bi-partisan agreement to ensure a successful implementation of the recommendations in that Report. I am confident the Government will be

addressing this issue of Judicial Reform with urgency, and am therefore looking forward to the contribution of the Minister of Justice in the State of the Nation debate in the Senate. Mr. Speaker, let us get on with the reform of the Justice System!

Mr. Speaker, **it is about time we, the Members of Parliament, lead**, and not only to create hope, but to build back the trust of the citizens in our system of Governance, so together, as a Country, as one, we will tackle the few thousand criminals that have this beautiful island of ours for ransom. I know that the Prime Minister, the new Minister of National Security, the recently appointed Commissioner of Police, the elected Members of this Honourable House, the Church leaders, the Private Sector leaders, and I know that the citizens of our Nation can get the job done. Mr. Speaker let us do it, we can do it. Let us get the job done once and for all! Mr. Speaker, I stand here ready and willing to join forces and be part of the fight against crime!

Mr. Speaker, we have made representation with Rural Electrification for Districts like Content, Ennis, Bottom Bonnett, Merryland. And so many other things I could talk about today, but time is up against me, and I therefore would like to pass on to a critical issue, and that is the looming Constitutional crisis that our Country is facing.

LOOMING CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to a matter that has been in the public domain since the last General Election, and that is the many petitions that have been filed by the Opposition against elected members who sit on this side of the House. Whereas I shall not discuss the details of each challenge, as they are presently before the Courts, I nevertheless would like to address this matter on a general basis, as this is an issue that is close to me.

Mr. Speaker, in our first General Elections in 1944, our National Hero, a highly respected fellow country man, the Right Honourable Norman Manley, did not win his seat of Eastern St. Andrew; as a matter of fact so much was the pull of our also well respected and National Hero the Right Honourable Sir Alexander Bustamante, that Norman Manley lost to the relatively unknown Dr. Fagan. The JLP won 25 seats to the PNPs 5 seats and 2 independents. But it was another instance in which Norman Manley would once again prove to this Nation and its people that the democratic system we had adopted and believed in was greater than any one person, even Norman Manley himself.

It is reported that Norman Manley, the founding President of the PNP, on that day, the 14th of December 1944, on knowing the results of the election, said ***Vox Populi, Vox dei, The People have spoken!. Vox Populi, Vox dei, The People have spoken!***

Mr. Speaker it is amazing how much has changed in the PNP since 1944, and how much of the foundation laid by its leaders has been eroded.

Mr. Speaker, after the 3rd of September 2007, the now President of the PNP did not say anything close to ***The People have Spoken***, but rather, at their annual Conference, it was more like ***I will be your worst nightmare***. And indeed what a nightmare she has created, or what a nightmare she has set upon the people of Jamaica.

The Opposition has engaged in a process to discredit the constitutionality of the present Government; they have filed several election petitions seeking to have the Courts put aside the will of the people, and in place have them send to this Honourable House as the people's Representatives the candidates that were, in ALL cases, categorically rejected in the last General Election.

Mr. Speaker, it is a fact that ALL the Members of The House on this side are Jamaicans and even more so, those of us who have been taken to court by the PNP are Jamaicans by right of BIRTH. How dare the Opposition challenge our commitment to Jamaica, land we love? How dare the Opposition challenge the people who have sent us here to represent them? How dare the Opposition challenge the legality of the present Government, after the People have spoken? Is it that they are DEAF?

Mr. Speaker, the Opposition has said that it is only upholding the Constitution and as such they have filed petitions against the Members of Parliament who they believed could be in a position of conflict with the Constitution. But I say, if they were to be considered honourable in their cause, I ask why didn't they advise the Electoral Office of Jamaica, within a reasonable time frame, what in their view was a potential conflict some of the candidates could be in? If the Opposition was to be considered honourable in their cause, why didn't they file petitions against Members of Parliament of their side who you could argue are in conflict with the Constitution, including those with an English passport? The answer is simple, it was not about standing for an honourable cause, it was not about the Constitution, it was not about democracy, it was not about the people, it was about ensuring that they, the PNP, could be victorious at the polls, even if it was against and at the cost of our internationally acclaimed and well recognized democratic traditions.

Mr. Speaker, how can the Opposition challenge the voice of the citizens and expect to have persons enter this Honourable House not on a basis of being sent here by the People, but on the basis of being sent here by a Court. It is a disgrace!

Mr. Speaker, The Prime Minister has expressed publicly that he will not allow anyone not sent by the people to enter this Honourable House. He said, and I quote, "I am not going to allow anybody to sit in Parliament who was rejected by the people at the polls".

The Prime Minister rightly says so, as he recognizes the foundation of our democratic system. The Prime Minister has also expressed that he has no desire for a General Election at this time, so have my Honourable friends on this side of the House and I gather some of the Honourable members on that side of the House. Recent polls have shown that the people of Jamaica also have no desire in going through another election; and understandably so, they SPOKE exactly 9 months ago. But what I presently see is that the Prime Minister is being cornered and pressured by the persistence of the Opposition in pursuing these petitions, and he might unfortunately find himself in a position with no other alternative than to call a General Election.

Mr. Speaker, let the people of Jamaica know, that if the decision to have an Election has to be taken by the Prime Minister, it is to avoid a Constitutional crisis pursued by the Opposition and its agents, a crisis that could erode to a great extent the democratic values and traditions we all should believe in.

If that decision has to be taken it is my expectation that the President of the PNP will then, after that election, have to say ***The People have Shouted and I now must listen.***

Mr. Speaker, I nevertheless do pray that good sense will prevail and that the Leader of the Opposition will put Country above Party, put Country above self, and as in my opening sentence I repeat what President Woodrow Wilson said in 1910 “The future is not for parties ‘playing

politics', but for measures conceived in the largest spirit, pushed by parties whose leaders are statesmen, not demagogues, who love, not their offices, but their duty and the opportunity for service".

Mr. Speaker, I pray that the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition will be able to meet and have this situation solved as soon as possible, for the sake of the Jamaican people.

CLOSING REMARKS

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I wish to state that NESC is a beautiful constituency with wonderful people, people whom I refer to as being from the good old Jamaica, where respect, courtesy and good manners are all a part of their way of life. Although having been through many years of disregard, the people of NESC have remained quiet and patient; with some of the worst social, economical and physical infrastructure conditions, and yet have waited for their moment, for their day. Today is the beginning of that day. My people, you could argue, for many years have suffered some of the worst forms of neglect, with tracks and rivers replacing roadways, springs and streams replacing potable water, no recognition of, nor support for, community based youth organisations or schools, no assistance for our farmers who continue to labour as their forefathers did for decades. You could say that in the recent past my constituency was hardly recognised. I wish to advise Parliament and the people of NESC that those days of neglect and lack

of representation are no more. Let me state categorically, today, that NESC is back. It is back on the political map. As the elected Representative of the people of NESC in this Honourable House, let me state that the days of the former Members of Parliament, the great Johnny Gyles and Roy McNeil, are back, and Mr. Speaker, they are here to stay.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I must thank the Prime Minister for the confidence he has put in me; I wish to also thank him and his Executive for the excellent job they have been doing since assuming office in these very challenging times. As we navigate through these very turbulent waters, with challenges such as the continued rise of the price of oil and food in the world market, the scourge of crime, I am confident that this ship called Jamaica has on its deck a competent and capable crew, and is being led by a Captain with a very steady pair of hands, a Captain with a clear vision as where he wants to take us, a Jamaica of peace, love, and equal opportunity to justice and prosperity; a Jamaica where not everyone will be rich, but no one has to be poor.

Mr. Speaker, may God bless the members of this Honourable House, may God bless the People of Jamaica, and may God bless us all as we continue to seek his divine intervention in leading us forward as a Nation.

Mr. Speaker, may God Bless Jamaica, land we love!