

**2004/2005 SECTORAL DEBATE PRESENTATION BY HARRY
DOUGLAS, MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF WATER &
HOUSING**

Mr. Speaker, may I commence by congratulating you on the exemplary manner in which you have directed the affairs of this Honourable House. Our debates and deliberations can be robust at times, and tempers even flare, but you Sir have always maintained a calm demeanor and has consistently demonstrated utmost impartiality.

I want to thank Almighty God for the strength, energy and superb health he has given me, enabling me to carry out this tedious responsibility of being the people's representative. I must thank the people of South East St. Mary who have on four (4) consecutive occasions reposed enormous confidence in me, in electing me as their representative in this Honourable House. To my indoor and outdoor agents, members of the constituency committee, councillors and caretaker councillors, my fellow workers in the trench I thank you – you are a great team. Mr. Speaker, I will not be seeking re-election, but I want to assure this Honourable House that South East St. Mary in the foreseeable future will continue to be represented in this House under the PNP banner.

Mr. Speaker I want to thank the Most Honourable Prime Minister for the opportunity he has afforded me to serve this country in the capacity of Minister of State with responsibility for water in the Ministry of Water and Housing. I certainly thank God for the quality of leadership he has provided this country, especially his preference for consultation over confrontation.

I want to say to my fellow colleagues on this side and especially members of the Cabinet, that when the days were dark and friends were few, you never flinched or faltered from taking the tough decisions. That is why we are standing here today despite the naysayers and prophets of doom who were heralding that the Government could not present a budget. My colleague and friend Hon. Omar Davies has in a masterful way “*mashed down that lie.*” As we speak our economy is moving in the right direction. Let us continue to work so that once more inflation can move to a single digit figure and the economy will continue its upward trend, creating more jobs in the process.

Mr. Speaker, the constituency of South East St. Mary has but one large estate that employs many workers – the St. Mary Banana Estate, a subsidiary

of the Jamaica Producers Group. I would like to put on record the constituency's appreciation of what this company has done and continues to do for workers and their children and institutions in the constituency such as the Annotto Bay Hospital. Mr. Speaker, as we speak the Jamaica Producers Group is spending over \$800,000 on the Annotto Bay All Age School.

In a special way I want to thank my wife and family for the tremendous support they have given me over the years. May I also thank Minister Buchanan and the team at the Ministry for their support as we advance the People's agenda of expanding water supply and affordable housing islandwide.

In this presentation I propose to treat with the following:

1. Constituency matters.
2. Matters relating to the Portfolio of Water and Housing.
3. Other matters about which I have particular interest/concern.

South East St. Mary

Constituency Matters

EDUCATION

Mr. Speaker when I became the Member of Parliament in South East St. Mary in 1989 there was only one (1) high school in the Constituency – the Mary Mount High School for Girls. Today, we have the Annotto Bay High School, St. Mary Technical High School and three (3) primary and junior high schools – Enfield, Clonmel, and Castleton.

The Annotto Bay High School which was built to accommodate 401 students now has an enrollment of 595, and the intake of GSAT students this year will be greater than previous years. The school has therefore been operating on a double shift system. Mr. Speaker, we are looking forward for the expansion of the facilities in this school.

Mr. Speaker, in 1987 as a Councillor of the St. Mary Parish Council, when the Grays Inn lands came up for subdivision, I moved a resolution, which was accepted, that twenty five (25) acres of land should be reserved for the Ministry of Education. Part of this land now houses the Annotto Bay High School. The expansion of the Annotto Bay High School which I spoke to, will now take place on this land. But Mr. Speaker we are going further. It is my vision that this site be developed into an educational centre for the entire

constituency, with a preparatory school, a vocational training centre, a cultural complex for the visual and performing arts and ultimately a community college. Mr. Speaker, we have gone beyond vision and we have in hand architectural drawings for the preparatory school and the vocational centre. I have thrown myself completely into the search for funding of these two (2) facilities, as well as for the expansion of the Annotto Bay High School. I am committed to this because I believe in education and training to increase opportunities for the people of my constituency to realize their potential and participate fully in the socio-economic development of this country. Not only my constituency will benefit, but the entire St. Mary and even parts of Portland. This, Mr. Speaker, I want to be my enduring contribution to South East St. Mary.

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Speaker, in the constituency of South East St. Mary farming is the main economic activity. Ninety five percent (95%) of these farmers occupy five (5) acres of land or less. Over the last ten (10) years these farmers have been suffering from extremes of climate, that is, drought on the one hand and severe flooding on the other. This however has not dampened their spirit.

Mr. Speaker, I am mindful of the economic challenges we are facing and the prudent way in which the Hon. Omar Davies has been managing our financial affairs, and disappointing the naysayers. But Mr. Speaker I am asking the Hon. Minister on behalf of the small farmers of Jamaica in general, and in South East St. Mary in particular to provide some funding to the Ministry of Agriculture to provide these farmers with seedlings, fertilizer, pesticide, as well as, assistance to those rearing small stocks. Farmers rearing pigs, goats and poultry can make a decent living. Bananas and plantain for domestic consumption attract excellent prices, ginger and sorrel attract top prices abroad. Sorrel when processed into chutney is a delicacy in Europe, and we are now only satisfying a small portion of this market. Given these opportunities we have a duty to assist the farmers to exploit them. I am sure my plea has fallen on fertile ears.

The Water & Housing Portfolio

Water

Mr. Speaker, in his Sectoral Presentation the Hon. Minister of Water and Housing presented the big picture in respect of where we are going with the development of water. He spoke about major projects that will trigger significant development in agriculture and tourism, and which will in turn bolster economic growth. I do not propose to repeat those. I would rather like to focus on what we will be doing in some of the smaller rural communities in expanding water supply, and thereby improving quality of life. We have not forgotten the small people, because after all “*we put people first.*”

This Honourable House is no doubt aware that the Darliston Water Supply was partially commissioned in 2001, with the transmission mains completed, and the necessary booster stations and reservoirs. I am now pleased to advise this Honourable House that funding has been provided in the current budget for the expansion of the Roaring River Treatment Plant to not only improve the quality of treatment at the facility, but to treat significantly more water (2mgd), than the old facility could treat. This development is significant for two (2) reasons. Firstly, it is well known that this area is endemic to typhoid and adequate treatment is therefore essential to

safeguard public health. More significantly the increased supply from this new treatment plant will not only satisfy the 29,000 population of Darliston and its environs, but will extend supply to such areas as Barney Side, Stuie, Cornwall Mountain, Mackfield, Cold Spring, Mount Stewart, Castle Mountain and the town of Savanna-La-Mar. We have previously layed pipelines in most of these communities and now we have the water to run through those lines. Mr. Speaker, by this one stroke we would have solved most of the water supply problems in Eastern and Central Westmoreland. I am happy to report that Cooper and Associates Limited commenced work on this new treatment plant in June and are slated to complete its construction in February 2005.

But Mr. Speaker, our activity in this area will not stop with the treatment plant. The truth is we would have spent probably a billion dollars on the Darliston system and on pipeline extension in the many districts I have named above. We cannot spend this kind of money to put in water supply systems and then allow human activity to compromise the source of the water. It is for this reason why we are taking action to relocate a substantial part of the community of Roaring River, where the existing lifestyle of many residents pose a serious threat to the quality of the water source through contamination. I have spent a considerable amount of time as Minister

meeting with the residents and their representatives. I am pleased to announce that we have secured nearly fifty (50) acres of land from the West Indies Sugar Company to relocate the residents so affected and to secure this water source. Discussions are also advanced with the National Housing Development Corporation (NHDC) to develop this property and with the National Housing Trust (NHT) to fund the development. The beneficiaries are expected to pay for the lots using their NHT entitlement, for which most of them are qualified.

Mr. Speaker, our focus in expanding rural water supply is not limited to Westmoreland. In addition to the Roaring River Treatment Plant we will also be completing the Huddersfield/Mango Valley Water Supply in St. Mary, the Broadgate Water Supply also in St. Mary, Kellits Water Supply in Clarendon, the Santa Cruz Water Supply in St. Elizabeth, the Redwood Water Supply, the Princessfield, Colbeck/Planters and Buxton Town Water Supply in St. Catherine. In addition to these projects we will be making substantial improvements to the Mandeville Water Supply to increase service reliability. The New Forrest Water Supply will also be improved to extend the supply to Bull Savannah.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry has a cohesive and comprehensive programme for rural water supply which will be rolled out before the end of this month. Suffice it to say that the time has come to treat rural water supply expansion in a focused and sustainable way and our intention in this new initiative is to ensure that we get maximum value from our investments in rural water. This Government accepts its obligation to provide access to potable water in every nook and cranny of this country because water is life.

Mr. Speaker, I want to turn my attention to the Rapid Response Programme. This Programme is a critical part of our strategy to respond to those communities without any access to water, as well as, to provide temporary relief to those who enjoy water supply service, when those systems are temporarily dislocated. A trucking operation in the long run is always more expensive to operate than a conventional system, and therefore as we expand supply over the island, the role of the Rapid Response Programme will gradually diminish. Because the Programme serves predominantly poor rural communities we are not able to charge the full cost of the service. At the same time it is imperative that we run the Programme as efficiently as possible, minimizing costs and realizing maximum revenue. It is for this reason why we embarked on a reorganization of the Programme which

commenced last September. We have installed new management, improved our fleet management to cut costs, we have made more efficient arrangements for procuring fuel resulting in substantial savings and we are undertaking a painstaking and comprehensive overhaul of processes and operations with a view to stem stealing of water by our workers. It is noteworthy that two (2) former managers are before the courts for fraud and we have had to dismiss at least six (6) people from the driver/pump operator level. We are now focusing on implementing a tracking system for the trucks and we will shortly be instituting a new regime of engagement for the drivers/pump operators. To close the gap between the cost of running the service and the revenue derived, we increased the rates in March. I am happy to say that with the increased rates and the gains from our cost cutting activities, we have been able to reduce the level of subsidy from the budget from JA\$150M in the 2000/2001 financial year to JA\$47M in the current year. Mr. Speaker, I want to celebrate this Programme today, because it is unimaginable how we would have coped in this current drought that is affecting many parishes especially in Central Jamaica. Thanks to this Programme we no longer have to close schools because of lack of water and while we await new irrigation projects in South St. Elizabeth, we have been able to keep farming going through the provision of irrigation water in this

Programme. I want to salute all the workers in the Programme who have had to work for long hours under trying circumstances in responding to the drought situation which has been prevailing in many parishes since January.

NATIONAL WATER COMMISSION (NWC)

Mr. Speaker, I have already outlined some of the critical water supply expansion programmes that will be undertaken by the government. We are however, not only concerned with expansion to new areas, but also with improving service reliability to existing customers of the NWC. It is no secret that for years the NWC was never provided the levels of tariff increase necessary to properly maintain its systems. Consequently, many systems have been run down, pipelines leak and pumps fail frequently. All of this result in loss of revenues to the Commission and poor quality service to the customer. Mr. Speaker, this government took the bold decision of establishing the Office of Utilities Regulation (OUR), removing once and for all determination of tariffs from the political directorate.

Mr. Speaker, the OUR recently granted the NWC a nineteen percent (19%) tariff increase. One significant feature of this new tariff, is the provision of some \$500M per annum for rehabilitation of existing systems. The NWC has been very transparent in terms of how it will utilize these funds. Indeed, the entire programme to be executed over three (3) years was the subject of a newspaper supplement. The Hon. Donald Buchanan also tabled a Ministry Paper in this very House, outlining the programme.

Mr. Speaker, this kind of transparency is healthy for our democracy and consistent with the concept of good governance. However, I would like to suggest that we take the concept of good governance a little bit further to emphasize that everyone must pay for the services that the NWC provides them. The Rehabilitation Programme is to be funded from tariffs. Therefore if people do not pay their bills, the necessary improvements will not occur. Since becoming Minister of State, I have spent a considerable amount of time going around from community to community, extolling the virtues of paying water bills. Mr. Speaker, I am sure that the events of New Forrest/ Alligator Pond is fresh in everybody's mind. I want to point out that under the Rehabilitation Programme, the NWC will be making improvements to this very system, by extending it to Bull Savannah. We simply cannot be pumping millions into providing the service for people, only for people to refuse to pay for the service they receive. The NWC was lambasted for disconnecting the service to a community that consistently refused to honour their obligation. I do not recall hearing a similar chorus of voices encouraging people to pay. Taking responsibility for honouring our obligation is part and parcel of good governance.

DIVESTMENT OF TOWN HOUSES AND CONDOMINIUMS

Mr. Speaker, I will limit my treatment of the housing portfolio to our divestment programme. In a country where throughout the long period of slavery and colonization the masses were landless and constrained to live on the fringes, security of tenure assumes particular significance. The Ministry has a significant number of housing schemes, which were developed as cooperatives and condominiums, in some instances from in the 1960's. Many of the residents in these schemes occupy on the basis of rental agreements, others occupy informally. In an effort to regularize their tenancies, the Ministry has embarked upon a programme of divestment of these units.

Mr. Speaker, the approach that we have taken is to carry out occupancy surveys of the subject properties to determine on what basis occupants are in the units. Once bona fide occupants are established the units are offered for sale and a payment plan worked out. On completion of payment, transfers are done and the title handed over to the owners. Using this approach Mr. Speaker, we have divested nearly 400 units in Arnett Gardens Housing

Schemes, namely, Schemes 4A, 4B and 7. We are also divesting units in Duhaney Park, Orange Villa and Armada Court. Mr. Speaker, we intend to take this approach to other corporate area schemes and I am in touch with the respective Members of Parliament. We are in the business of empowering people, giving them security of tenure and assisting people to build stable communities through pride in ownership.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Speaker, I would like to conclude this presentation by making some comments on a few issues that concern me, not so much as a Member of the Executive or as a representative of the people, but as a committed Jamaican who wishes the best for his country.

Mr. Speaker, I have become increasingly concerned about the serious deterioration of the driving habits of many motorists, resulting in death and mayhem on our roads. Human life is precious and the most important resource we have is our human resource. It is therefore disheartening to see the waste of human lives caused by discourtesy, disrespect for each other on the roads, lack of patience, irresponsibility and recklessness. If we get back

to the basics of patience and respect for each other, we would have avoided many of these serious accidents.

Mr. Speaker, the way a vast number of drivers operate on the roadway, leaves one to wonder if they were given the routine test for their drivers licence. Mr. Speaker, it is my opinion that when there are serious accidents, where drivers are charged for careless, reckless and dangerous driving, they should be subjected to automatic reexamination by a panel of no less than three (3) examiners. I am pleading with the Hon. Minister of Transport and Works to amend the Road Traffic Act to give effect to this suggestion.

Mr. Speaker, the youths of this country represent an important reservoir of potential talents, from which we must draw to construct a viable society. I am greatly disappointed with the coarseness and callousness with which our youths are treating their peers in some cases and elders in general. Institutions of learning and the teachers who impart knowledge are treated with disdain and scant regard. Many youths fear neither man nor God. I am disgusted with the vulgarity in our popular music and the high dosage of nudity twenty four (24) hours per day on cable television. The fear of God, whomever you perceive him to be is no more with us in our predominantly

Christian culture. This is spelling doom unless we reverse the trend. The moral fibre of our society is under serious threat, and we need to take a stand for decency and integrity. Under this Government opportunities for higher education abound, be it the traditional tertiary institutions or skills training provided through the HEART/NTA. I say to the youths of this country wake up and smell the coffee, empower yourself with a skill and be at the forefront in leading our country to greater levels of progress in the future.

Mr. Speaker, I want to turn my attention now to us politicians. As politicians I am of the view that we have the toughest job in this country. We are expected to be all things to the greater majority of our constituents.

Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the toughness of our job, I believe that we must continue to provide the leadership to build a sound economic foundation for this country and improve the standard of living of our people through good health care, good education, and a first class justice system in a secure country in which law and order prevail.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that since the elections of 1944 at different times and under varying circumstances we destroy ourselves for political office. The

bitterness continues even after we have been elected. We say the most vicious and vulgar things about each other. We build vengeance and hatred among our supporters and even sometimes within the same party. Let us clean up our act and act with decency and humility towards our brothers and sisters regardless of our politics or religion.

Mr. Speaker, the sixty (60) elected members of this Honourable House are the only chief executives who have no control over the allocation of resources necessary to execute their mandate. Let us resolve to change that now as tomorrow will be too late. I call upon this Honourable House to pass legislation mandating that ten percent (10%) of the National Budget be spent on constituency development directed by the people's representative. We as Members of Parliament are willing to subject ourselves to the most rigorous checks and balances and be accountable to the Auditor General in respect of these disbursements.

Mr. Speaker, in this Fiscal Year (2004-2005) let us start the drive to empower the people's representatives so that they can bring real relief to their constituents. Mr. Speaker, as a Government we will continue to work for a better Jamaica, a more humane Jamaica, a land of peace, love,

prosperity and justice. I say to my parliamentary colleagues let us speak the truth and speak it ever, cause it what it will. We have a wonderful opportunity to build a great country, a brighter tomorrow and to do it with our own hands.

God bless you.