

**BUDGET
DEBATE
2024**

**POLICY
RECOMMENDATIONS
BY THE OPPOSITION**

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SHADOW MINISTER

**FINANCE, PLANNING AND
THE PUBLIC SERVICE**

Policy Recommendations from the 2024 Budget Presentation by Julian Robinson, MP

Recommendations from Critique of Minister's Budget Presentation

1. **Transparent Financing** - The government must fully and transparently explain the financing mechanisms behind the budget, particularly the \$45 billion in "Estimated flows from securitization of receivables". It is crucial for the public to understand the details of such significant transactions, including the nature of the receivables, the parties involved, the terms of the deal, and the long-term implications for the nation's finances.
2. **Effective Execution of the Census** - The government must address the failures in conducting the 2020 Census. Accurate and timely demographic data is essential for planning, budgeting, and delivering services to the populace. The government should take immediate steps to complete the census efficiently and establish mechanisms to prevent such delays in the future.
3. **Protection for Local Farmers** - In light of the removal of GCT on imported raw foods, the government must implement safeguards to prevent the dumping of cheap, subsidized produce into the Jamaican market, which could harm local farmers. Measures should be implemented to ensure that local agriculture remains competitive and sustainable.
4. **Re-evaluation of the Reverse Income Tax Credit** - The government should assess the effectiveness of the reverse income tax credit as an incentive for tax compliance. If the current incentive is insufficient to encourage non-compliant taxpayers to file and pay taxes, alternative strategies should be considered.
5. **Resolution of Public Sector Compensation Issues** - The government must address the unresolved issues stemming from the Public Sector Compensation review, including the concerns of travelling officers and the anomalies where subordinates are paid more than their supervisors. It is vital to engage in respectful, open communication and dialogue with public sector workers and their unions to find satisfactory solutions.
6. **FINSAC Commission and Archives Transparency** - The government should provide clarity on the status of the FINSAC Commission's report and ensure the complete and transparent release of the Commission's archives. This transparency is essential for public trust and understanding of the Commission's findings and recommendations. The Minister says he will publish the Commission's archives on a "specially curated website", but it is unclear: what does he mean by a curated website if he says he will release all the documents? Which one is it? Is he doing a document dump or is he picking and choosing what he puts out?

Policy Recommendations to Improve the Economy

These policy recommendations aim to address the key challenges and opportunities identified by Julian Robinson, MP, in his 2024 budget debate presentation. The successful

implementation of these policies requires committed leadership, transparent governance, and active collaboration between the government, the private sector, and civil society.

- 1. Comprehensive Crime Prevention Strategy** - The government should balance its crime control efforts with significant investment in crime prevention measures. This includes the reinstatement and expansion of social intervention programmes that address the root causes of crime and violence, such as poverty, lack of opportunity, and social exclusion.
- 2. Investment in Public Transportation** - The government must commit to substantial investment in public transportation, including the Jamaica Urban Transit Company (JUTC), to improve efficiency and reduce congestion. Exploring additional modes of transport, such as light rail systems, should be part of a holistic approach to enhancing mobility and productivity.
- 3. Implementation of a Light Rail Transit System** - This recommendation emphasizes the need to explore and implement alternative modes of public transportation, specifically the introduction of a Light Rail Transit (LRT) system, to enhance connectivity, reduce traffic congestion, and improve overall mobility within urban centres, particularly in the Kingston Metropolitan Area (KMA). The proposed Light Rail Transit system presents a sustainable and efficient solution to these challenges. By operating on dedicated tracks, either at ground level or elevated, the LRT system can offer reliable and timely public transportation, independent of road traffic conditions. Key considerations for the LRT system include:
 - **Connectivity:** The LRT should connect major destinations and transportation hubs within the KMA, such as Spanish Town, Portmore, Half-Way-Tree, Downtown Kingston, Cross Roads, and Papine. This strategic connectivity would facilitate seamless travel across the region, catering to the daily commuting needs of the population.
 - **Capacity and Efficiency:** Light rail systems can transport a larger number of passengers per trip compared to buses, significantly reducing the number of vehicles needed and thus easing road congestion. The efficiency of an LRT system can also contribute to reduced travel times and increased predictability in daily commutes.
 - **Productivity Impact:** The LRT system, with dedicated tracks and priority signalling, can offer faster and more reliable transportation compared to traditional road-based systems. This reliability can significantly reduce commute times for workers, allowing for more predictable and efficient daily schedules. Faster commutes mean employees can spend less time in transit and more time on productive activities, either at work or with leisure and family, enhancing overall life quality.
 - **Urban Development:** The introduction of an LRT system can drive transit-oriented development, encouraging higher-density, mixed-use developments near transit stations. This can lead to revitalized urban areas and more efficient land use.

- 4. Education System Reform** - The government must undertake a comprehensive reform of the education system to address systemic failures and learning loss. This includes mainstreaming STEAM education, leveraging institutions like HEART for skills training, and incorporating Character Education in the curriculum to instil fundamental human values. We believe it is important to address these problems at an early age, and socialise young people for the overall good of our nation.
- 5. Table the Quarterly Reports of the Education Transformation Oversight Committee (ETOC) in Parliament** – By tabling the ETOC's quarterly reports in Parliament, the process ensures that education transformation efforts are subject to scrutiny by elected representatives. This allows for a broader range of perspectives in evaluating progress, addressing challenges, and refining strategies. Parliamentary debate can also foster bipartisan support for necessary reforms, ensuring that education transformation transcends political cycles and receives the sustained attention and resources it requires.
- 6. Renewable Energy Expansion** - The government should accelerate efforts to increase the share of renewable energy in the national grid. This includes facilitating the rapid implementation of new renewable energy projects and supporting initiatives like household solar rooftop installations to reduce dependence on expensive and environmentally harmful energy sources.
- 7. National Push for Value Chain Movement** - The government should spearhead a national initiative to assist companies in ascending the value chain, particularly in the MSME sector, by providing extensive technical assistance, access to credit, and facilitation in research and development. This initiative should aim to harness the natural creativity of Jamaican entrepreneurs and propel them towards global competitiveness and innovation. We propose to focus the resources of the Jamaica Business Development Corporation (JBDC), the Development Bank of Jamaica (DBJ) the SRC and other institutions to provide technical assistance whether it is trade agreements, credit, financing, machinery credits staff training, R&D in a concerted, deliberate way. There are funds allocated for MSMEs at the DBJ that have not been utilised, whether it's because the process to get these funds is too bureaucratic, or because our entrepreneurs don't have the acumen or the time to jump through the hoops. We need to simplify processes to ensure our business can access government programmes and initiatives, but also ensure that whatever assistance is provided allows the businesses to pursue higher value activities, make global linkages, and raise their productivity.
- 8. Education and Workforce Upskilling** - Beyond the overarching need for education system reform, there's a specific call for an aggressive, data-driven approach to upskilling the current workforce in partnership with the private sector. This includes scaling up literacy programmes, particularly for those in the workforce, and tailoring short-term training programmes (which provide graduates with certification in particular areas demanded by the private sector) that blend technical education with soft skills, aimed at empowering the 'at-risk' youth and those marginally engaged in the formal education system.
- 9. Solar Rooftop Solutions for Households** - As part of the investment in renewable energy, there is a proposal for the government to support the installation of solar

rooftop solutions for households. This could be financed through existing taxes designated for energy purposes, helping to manage energy costs for citizens while also contributing to Jamaica's environmental and climate targets.