



# **THRONE SPEECH**

## **2006-2007**

Delivered by

**His Excellency the Most Hon.**  
**Professor Kenneth O. Hall, ON, OJ**  
Governor-General

Ceremonial Opening of Parliament

Wednesday, April 12, 2006

GORDON HOUSE

As we enter a new legislative year, your Administration does so in what could be described as a new and historic context. During the last legislative year, your Administration experienced the retirement of The Most Honourable Sir Howard Cooke, who served as Governor-General and hence presented this Throne Speech for fourteen consecutive years.

Your Administration, as well as the entire country, wish the Most Honourable Sir Howard and the Most Honourable Lady Cooke all the very best in their retirement.

During the preceding legislative year, the Parliament as one of its final acts prior to being prorogued, paid fitting tribute to the contribution of the former Prime Minister, the Most Honourable Percival James Patterson, who had the distinction of being the longest-serving incumbent in that office. The contents of the tributes were eloquent testimony to the quality of his leadership. This Administration once again records its gratitude for the sterling service he rendered.

This legislative year witnesses the advent of a new Administration which has the historic distinction of being led by the country's first female Prime Minister and, including pre-Independence Jamaica, its first female head of government.

A change of the guard at the leadership level of government provides an opportunity to reflect, albeit briefly, on how well we have lived up to the undertakings given in the Throne Speeches since the last General Elections in late 2002.

Looking back over those three years, some of the promises made and delivered were:

The enactment of The Child Care and Protection Act; the conversion of the Child Development Agency into an Executive Agency; the appointment of a Children's Advocate following the recommendations of the Review Panel on Children's Homes and Places of Safety.

Making the Early Childhood Commission operational and the appointment of a highly-qualified Executive Director.

The enactment of the National Health Fund Act and the coming into being of the Fund in August 2003.

The passage of the Municipalities Act and the coming into being of the first Municipality under the Act, Portmore, in 2003.

In the fight against crime, several pieces of legislation were enacted. These included:

The Terrorism Prevention Act

The Criminal Justice (Plea Negotiations and Agreement Act)

The Firearms (Amendment) Act

The Finger Prints (Amendment) Act.

In terms of the efficiency of the Courts, Case Management software was installed in eleven Resident Magistrates Courts fulfilling a commitment made in the 2005/06 Throne Speech.

The promise to facilitate investment and growth made in 2003/2004 is manifested, among other things, in the expansion of the tourism sector - some 1,200-rooms were constructed last year; and many more are on schedule to be constructed.

Clients now have 24-hour access to the National Land Agency's database.

The promise that the National Irrigation Commission would commence the 'flagship' projects of the National Irrigation Development Plan was implemented with the launching of the Pedro Plains Project in January 2005.

Ninety-five Agencies now have Citizens' Charters in published or draft form. These Charters set the standards of service to the public and against which the performance of agencies is judged.

The Government proposes, beginning this year, to increase the rate of passage of legislation, although giving due regard to the need to ensure that the 'finished product' is acceptable.

Among the pieces of legislation it proposes to bring to Parliament to have passed (or complete work on passage) during this Legislative Year are:

The Law Reform (Notice of Alibi) Bill - To provide for the giving of notice to the prosecution when the Defence intends to rely on Alibi evidence at trial within a prescribed period from time of arraignment.

The Incest (Punishment) Bill - To increase the penalty for incest and widen the categories of prohibited relationships and a related Offences Against the Person Bill to provide for more severe sanctions to deal with the offence of incest.

The Proceeds of Crime Bill - To address deficiencies in the ability of the authorities to respond effectively in the forfeiture of assets under existing legislation.

The Charter of Rights Bill - To replace the existing Chapter 3 of the Constitution with the new Chapter providing more comprehensive protection for the fundamental rights and freedoms of persons in Jamaica.

Police Public Complaints (Amendment) Bill - To review the complaints procedure and expand staffing of the Authority to better facilitate its functions.

ICC Cricket World Cup West Indies 2007 Bill, 2006 ("Sunset Legislation") - To facilitate the efficient and effective hosting of the CWC 2007.

Electoral Commission of Jamaica (Interim) Representation of People (Interim Reform) (Repeal) Bill - To replace the Electoral Advisory Committee with an independent Electoral Commission.

The National Disabilities Bill - To provide for further protection of the rights of persons with disabilities.

Broadcasting and Radio Rediffusion Bill - To reflect changes in the regulatory responsibilities and the structure of the Broadcasting Commission, etc.

Tourist (Duty Free) Shopping System (Change of Name) (Amendment) Bill - To provide for the establishment of Duty-free shopping system for arriving passengers, and

The Electronic Transactions Bill - To facilitate the use of electronic transactions.

Legislation will also be introduced to define offences for crimes related to trafficking in persons and to provide for appropriate penalties.

Turning from the legislative agenda, a matter of some importance in strengthening our democracy, to which the Government intends to give priority attention, is that of the transparent and realistic financing of political parties, to enable representatives to better service their constituents while providing funding for election campaigns. To this end, the Government proposes to begin discussions with the Opposition and the wider society in a search for solutions.

In terms of the economy, the Government will continue to pursue economic policies to reduce inflation, reduce the Debt/GDP ratio, reduce the fiscal deficit and, overall, promote long-term growth and prosperity. Consequently, it will be doubling its efforts to return to the trajectory that was in place towards achieving these ends; but, which was adversely affected by the unprecedented series of natural disasters and significant increases in the price of energy, which the country has faced.

Recognising their importance in creating employment, earning foreign exchange, and contributing to orderly social and economic development, the Government will do all it can to support the significant investment projects which are now underway or planned, in the bauxite and tourism sectors, highway construction, modernisation of our two international airports, the preparations for the World Cup of Cricket in 2007, as well as the new major transportation centre at Half-Way-Tree.

Big projects or operations are not the only significant employment-generating ones. Many small ones do. While the government will continue to support major projects such as those referred to, the government will give greater focus to small and medium-sized enterprises, as research has shown that these are where significant employment may be generated. The National Insurance Fund will be contributing to this effort through a \$1 billion loan facility.

The Government recognises that whilst it must 'balance its books' it must spare no effort to 'balance people's lives'.

The revitalisation of agriculture is an important element in this regard as the impact in rural areas, where the greater incidence of poverty currently exists, can be significant. Opportunities will be taken not only to meet local demand for agricultural products, but that of the growing tourism sector. This will be done through activities such as the Ebony Park Vegetable Project and the European Union Rural Diversification Programme.

The matter of poverty and its pervasive adverse implications have been a serious concern for our society. Whilst progress has been made in reducing its incidence, greater efforts are required to increase the rate of reduction of poverty and, importantly, avoid any relapse.

Existing poverty reduction programmes will be streamlined, but ever- greater emphasis will be placed on dealing with the problem 'upstream' via education and training.

The work of the Early Childhood Commission is a part of the process. In support of its work, great emphasis is being placed on the training of teachers in basic schools and the incorporation of a nutritional programme supported by the Ministry of Education and Youth and the CHASE Fund. CHASE, in fulfilling its mandate to support Early Childhood Education, has already approved some \$217 million for building or upgrading basic schools or resource centres; \$44 million for the training of Early Childhood Practitioners; and \$66 million for nutritional support.

Universal Secondary Education will be achieved following the construction of eight (8) new schools and the expansion of twenty-seven (27) others as they will result in the creation of 14,000 new places by September 2007.

The e-learning project developed between the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, Science and Technology and the Ministry of Education and Youth will be an important element in the process of transforming the educational landscape. The project will focus on the high school segment of the education system. The primary goal is to increase the quality of education in these schools. It will be implemented in some 150 high schools over the next three to four years at a cost of US\$50 million funded from the Universal Access Fund operated by the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, Science and Technology.

The rehabilitation of Inner-City communities is important in the fight against the twin evils of poverty and crime. A US\$32 million project is to be implemented with the aim of: (a) providing more access to basic services, including potable water; (b) improving solid waste management; (c) improving road infrastructure; (d) reducing the incidence of crime; (e) building capacity in fifteen (15) communities to manage and maintain the basic infrastructure.

A clean, beautiful and accommodating environment, throughout the country is an important ingredient for sustainable development. In recognition of this, the Government proposes to invest in and forge partnerships with the private sector, the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), communities and individuals to clean up and beautify Jamaica. This programme will also include giving special attention to signage.

Importantly, arrangements will be put in place to ensure that facilities are properly maintained on an ongoing basis.

The Government will continue steadfastly to pursue sound productive policies in the management of Jamaica's international relations and the promotion of the country's interests overseas, including the protection of our nationals.

The country will remain actively engaged in the United Nations; in particular the reform of the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council so that they can be more effective in promoting the multinational system for global peace and security.

Efforts will be continued to achieve the U.N. Millennium Development Goals aimed at meeting basic needs in terms of health, food, security and minimum elements of social well-being.

A critical priority area on which the welfare of the nation rests heavily is the foreign trade agenda. Accordingly, Jamaica will continue to be an effective participant in international trade negotiating forums such as the WTO and the ACP/EU.

In the ongoing Doha Round negotiations, Jamaica will continue to press, in conjunction with other developing states, for more favourable terms of trade and investment for small economies.

Developments concerning our sugar and banana industries will fully engage us so as to ensure that the best interests of our farmers and other persons involved in these industries are adequately protected to the fullest extent possible.

The strengthening of economic cooperation with our CARICOM partners will remain a matter of high priority. The subject of energy and energy security will become an integral part of our foreign policy in the region and external to it. On a bilateral basis, Jamaica expects, soon, to conclude an energy/alumina/aluminium cooperation agreement with the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

The country has been deepening its relations with the Diaspora. To this end, the second Diaspora conference will take place in Kingston on the 15th and 16th of June this year. It is expected that some four hundred and fifty delegates will join fifty of their local counterparts for what we all hope will be a productive conference.

As we contemplate the challenges and the need to exploit global opportunities for the welfare of our people, Jamaica will be opening a High Commission later this year in South Africa, to serve our interests in Southern and Eastern Africa.

In furthering our interests, be it socially, economically, or politically, we must strive to do so within an ethical framework. This framework includes treating all human beings equally, regardless of wealth, race, class, colour or gender; exhibiting virtues such as compassion, generosity, fairness, integrity, self-control and prudence; and, not least of all, respecting the rights of others.

These values might be considered a 'tall order' in a world many believe to be increasingly materialistic and individualistic; but we should strive nevertheless, as they are part and parcel of balanced development in any society.

The challenges faced by the country call for unity among all Jamaicans to build strong communities and a strong nation. Together, we can make it.

As the words of the poet, which were paraphrased by a speaker in these Chambers recently, go:

*"We have promises to keep  
And miles to go before we sleep"*

The Estimates of Expenditure will be presented later today.

I pray that the blessings of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels.