

ACCOUNTABILITY, TRANSPARENCY AND PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

IN ST ANDREW SOUTH EASTERN

Julian J. Robinson MP

Contribution to the State of the Constituency Debate

Wednesday, November 3, 2021

Madam Speaker,

I stand before this Honourable House in gratitude, first and foremost to the Almighty for continuing to bless me with health and strength to carry out my duties to my constituents and to my country. For the third time, I have been elected by the people of South Eastern St. Andrew to continue to represent their interests, the weight of that responsibility is one I bear with pride. I am grateful to my constituents for the confidence reposed in me, and I today recommit to represent them and their interests with integrity, dignity and accountability.

St Andrew South Eastern has a dedicated team of workers led by Councillor Andrew Swaby, Councillor Candidate Jesse James Clarke, Secretary Ivy Hill, Organisers Sonia Forbes, Samantha Harvey and a host of other volunteers who give yeoman's service behind the scenes, and in most cases unrecognized. Today I salute the dedicated workers and volunteers – named and unnamed – who keep giving of their time and talent. You are seen, you are important, and I am thankful for your service.

I want to also recognise our Party President and the Opposition Leader Mark Golding, and to thank him for his leadership and to thank my colleagues in the House and the Party for their support.

Of course, I would not be here today without the love and support of my family, particularly my wife and children, and I thank them for being patient and understanding of the long hours and hard work involved in representational politics.

DO BETTER FOR PARLIAMENTARY AND MP SUPPORT STAFF

Madam Speaker, in acknowledging the work of those who support us as parliamentarians, I want to make a special appeal for two categories of those workers. While I continue to stand in the gap for all workers, especially those who do not earn a liveable wage in an environment where food prices and the general cost of living soar, today I would like to highlight those who work here in Gordon House, and those who provide direct support to Parliamentarians.

The Parliamentary support staff in this very House are committed to excellence, and they work extremely long hours for very low wages. Some earn as little as \$10,000 weekly. When we meet

late into the night, close to the 8pm curfew hour, they must figure out on their own how to get public transportation to go home at those hours. As Parliamentarians, we need to reassess this category of worker and explore ways to improve their situation.

The second category are the drivers and secretaries who work directly with Members of Parliament. Many of them work for years and have no entitlement to a pension at the end of their years of service, even when they reach retirement age. For many, it is very difficult to find new or alternative employment at that stage of their lives. I ask that we make provisions for their pension based on some specific criteria. We could, for instance, consider adopting the same basic criteria for pensions that exists for Parliamentarians, for example, if a person has worked with an MP for a minimum of 2 Parliamentary terms, they become eligible for benefits to help them through their golden years.

Madam Speaker, I can't leave the area of public sector workers without acknowledging the work of the security forces and in particular the police and soldiers. Up Park Camp, the headquarters of the JDF is in my constituency as well as Harmon Barracks and a number of other critical JCF posts and offices. In a society plagued by high violent crime rates, I want to acknowledge and salute the men and women of the JDF and JCF who literally put their lives on the line daily to keep us safe.

COVID-19

Madam Speaker, before I delve into the meat of my presentation, I'd like to give an account of the things I've been doing in SE St. Andrew to help my constituents get through the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the early days, we distributed masks and hand sanitizers, and later provided care packages to the neediest – the elderly, those with restricted mobility, and those who lost their jobs or livelihoods. Those efforts are ongoing.

Also, from the very start of the pandemic, we have run a continuous public education campaign using town criers and social media. Since last year, our town crier has traversed the entire constituency regularly with messages about mask-wearing, hand-washing and physical distancing. We've since tweaked our messaging to bring relevant FACTUAL and practical information about vaccines; encouraging people to get vaccinated, telling them where to go, and trying to counter disinformation.

Madam Speaker, we have pushed hard to get the people to take the vaccines. While a number of the vaccination sites are in close proximity to my constituency, we provided transportation for those in need, as well as helped in completing online appointments. I personally have spent many hours meeting and receiving my constituents at vaccination sites to ensure that they follow through, and generally to reassure them that the vaccines are safe and effective.

On this side of the aisle, our commitment to fighting COVID is unwavering. Until this pandemic is over, we will continue to encourage all the things the health professionals recommend; mask wearing, hand sanitizing, social distancing and vaccination.

From last year, when face to face school was disrupted by Covid, I initiated and implemented a public WIFI hotspot in the community of Swallowfield, which is still operational today. The Universal Service Fund has completed one of its public Wi-Fi hotspots in the community of Jacques Road. We are grateful and look forward to the implementation of the others.

COMMITMENT TO ACCOUNTABILITY, TRANSPARENCY AND PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

Madam Speaker, when I was first elected to this House on December 29, 2011, I made a commitment to serve my constituents on the principles of accountability, transparency and participatory democracy.

Every year since first being elected, I have done an annual constituency report, even though there is no requirement to do so. My reports detail the expenditures undertaken from the Constituency Development Fund as well as other projects and programmes implemented. All nine of my annual reports can be viewed on my website at www.julianjrobinson.com.

I have also made it a regular practice to host annual Constituency Development Fund consultations to explain how the CDF process works and to get feedback from my constituents on their specific needs, wants and issues. This year, the gathering restrictions due to COVID-19 did not stop this tradition as we utilized the Zoom platform and held a virtual consultation.

Madam Speaker, I am proud to say that in terms of accountability, transparency and participatory democracy, I haven't just talked the talk on this issue, I have walked the walk and will continue to do so.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING AS TOOLS FOR EMPOWERMENT AND UPLIFTMENT

Madam Speaker, when I was first elected as an MP, I reflected on how best I could serve my constituents, given the multiplicity of needs and the limited resources available through the CDF. Given that it's impossible for an MP to undertake any large-scale infrastructure project without direct central Government support, I decided to use the majority of the resources available to me in the areas of education and training.

Like many of my colleagues in the House, I have provided educational support to students at the basic, primary, secondary and tertiary levels. I deliberately skew the resources to supporting students at the primary and secondary levels, as I believe it is critical that the

majority of our students matriculate at those levels. While I would ideally want to provide more to tertiary students, it is difficult given the relatively high tuition fees at that level and the large number of students requesting assistance. At another time, this House must discuss and debate the future of funding tertiary education.

In addition to the support from the CDF, I have utilized the National Unattached Youth Program from HEART to provide training opportunities for constituents. In executing this program, I chose partners who were already in the business of providing training and had the infrastructure to facilitate it. The partners, Cornerstone Ministries on Connolly Avenue, EXED Community College on Mountain View Avenue and the International University of the Caribbean on Old Hope Road, were also chosen for their geographic locations to ensure that students could get to a facility without paying more than 1 bus or taxi fare.

This year, the programme ran from January 4, 2021 to September 30, 2021, with 105 students enrolled; 30 at Cornerstone Ministries, 60 at EXED and 15 at IUC. The courses included training in marketable, high-demand skills that will lead to swift employment, specifically:

- Digital Animation
- Motor Vehicle Repairs (Cars & Light Trucks)
- Allied Health (Patient Care)
- Cosmetology
- Electrical Installation
- Computer Repairs
- Food Preparation

Madam Speaker I am proud to say that of the 105 registered at the start of the program, 80 have started assessments which should be completed in November. Some of the factors that contributed to the 25 not completing the courses, include some finding jobs during the program and delays in the payment of the stipend for transportation and lunch, which prevented others from attending.

As a constituency with a large number of young people, these and other programmes which seek to engage the youth and offer specialized training with the potential for employment, are encouraged and supported.

Going forward, we intend to increase the numbers of young people in training, especially in the critical area of Allied Health Care, as the need for health care support workers has grown exponentially as the pandemic continues to affect the nation.

It is important that we continue to prepare and equip our young people for the world of work. It is also important that we help the parents through useful programmes so that they can guide their children in making sensible choices. If we fail to do this, we are facing a future of

uncertainty. We, in South East St Andrew, are committed to supporting, motivating and equipping our people for a better tomorrow.

SWALLOWFIELD SUMMER CAMP AND PARENTING WORKSHOPS 2021

Madam Speaker, I normally host annual summer camps in the major communities throughout the constituency. We were not able to do it last year due to Covid, but this year, we did one camp for children from the Swallowfield community in partnership with Swallowfield Chapel and the Church of God of Prophecy, Old Hope Road.

The Christian based camp catered to 60 students aged 8 – 12 years old and covered the following areas:

1. Social/ Emotional Support – Self-awareness and Empathy
2. Literacy/language and Numeracy/ Arithmetic – Critical and creative thinking, decision making and problem solving, communication.
3. Art and craft and sport – Communication, resilience, assertiveness and self-control.
4. Spiritual – to relate properly to God and man.

In July, we also hosted parenting workshops twice per week to help parents and guardians develop healthy parenting skills and practices.

NANNYVILLE SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT PARK



Madam Speaker, we have started work to establish the Nannyville Sports and Entertainment Park. This is a collaborative public private sector partnership which will transform not just the immediate community but the entire eastern belt of the Corporate Area. There is actually no turf football field in that section of Kingston and St. Andrew and we believe it will attract football and sports lovers from all over.

The Park will have:

- Six a side turf football fields
- Enclosed stands
- Shops
- Walking trail

With the kind sponsorship of Carib Cement we have been able to start the walking trail and the Sports Development Foundation has provided \$5M which is being used to partially offset the cost of the football turf, which has been ordered and is being shipped to the island. We are also in discussions with the Tourism Product Development Company (TPDCO) re providing additional support.

A group of private sector investors has indicated a willingness to build out the stands and shops. The community is in the process of establishing a charitable organization to lease the playfield from the government to facilitate this development.

It is anticipated that the project will be completed in another 12 months.

DEVELOPING AN EQUITABLE MECHANISM FOR MPs TO ACCESS FUNDING FOR INFRASTRUCTURE WORKS

Madam Speaker, since the commencement of the State of the Constituency Debate, we have heard of colleagues speaking of significant sums of monies being spent on various infrastructure projects in their constituencies. Some colleagues are fortunate to boast of sums in the hundreds of millions, while others cannot.

In 2016, arising from the public outrage at the vast amount of money spent on bushing, the Prime Minister implemented a program where the sum of \$15M is allocated to each MP in December to undertake road patching, disaster mitigation and beautification works. Outside of the CDF, that is the only program an MP can definitively depend on to do small scale road and gully repairs. Of course, MPs can lobby and make representation to the NWA and or the portfolio minister responsible for works.

There is an urgent need to address the state of roadways, verges and gullies, not just in my constituency but in many others. Some are far worse than others. We cannot wait for a natural disaster, wrought by the looming threat of climate change, where lives are endangered before we act in the best interest of those we swear to serve.

Madam Speaker, I am calling for a specific allocation to be made available to all MPs to allow us to address specific needs in our constituencies. This work would be done through the NWA as the implementing agency with proper oversight and accountability to ensure that tax payers receive value for money.

BALANCING DEVELOPMENT WITH THE PEOPLE'S INTEREST

Madam Speaker, over the last 3-4 years, there has been a significant increase in the number of new residential and commercial developments in the Corporate Area, and in particularly in sections of my constituency, specifically in New Kingston, Seymour Lands and the Golden Triangle.

Single family dwelling homes are being demolished to give rise to multi storey townhouse and apartment complexes. These developments have been good for the economy as they have driven the boom in the construction industry, which remained resilient even during the Covid downturn.

However, Madam Speaker, for residents who live in these communities, these developments raise a number of issues, namely:

1. Developments often take place with no notice or consultations with neighbours, particularly where there is an approval for a change in the zoning from residential to commercial. In many cases there are clear violations of zoning rules

2. Developers often ignore the guidelines and requirements from state agencies with impunity – increasing densities and rooms, building more floors than agreed and ignoring setbacks which ensure privacy for neighbours
3. Public infrastructure such as roads are often damaged during construction and not returned to its original condition
4. There is inadequate water and sewage infrastructure to deal with the increased density of habitable rooms

Residents are, more often than not, powerless to halt these breaches. State agencies are slow to respond, if they even do, and in most cases, residents have to resort to expensive litigation at their personal cost to seek redress. Residents are also fearful of speaking out against these breaches as they feel they are up against powerful vested interests.

To be very clear, Madam Speaker, I support development and the right of private interests to make investments in pursuit of a return. However, the way it is currently being done infringes the rights of homeowners in these communities, changes the character of neighbourhoods and violates privacy rights.

No matter how important the economic value of these investments, we cannot continue to operate like it's the Wild Wild West.

Madam Speaker, the state agencies charged with the responsibility of holding developers accountable are simply failing residents in these communities.

Something must be done urgently to ensure there is adequate and appropriate balance and that residents' rights are respected.

Madam Speaker, over the past 6 months I have participated in meetings with residents from a number of citizens associations and community groups on these issues. The associations and communities represented at these meetings were not restricted to my constituency, but also included:

- Arcadia Citizens Association
- Beverley Hills Citizens Association
- Charlemont Drive Association
- Cunningham/Herb McKenley/Latham Avenue Neighbourhood Watch
- Eastwood Park Gardens Citizens Association
- Forest Hill Association
- Golden Triangle Neighbourhood Watch
- Hope Pastures Citizens Association
- Norbrook Citizens Association
- Paddington Terrace Citizens Association
- Widcombe Neighbourhood Association

These groups have written to the Chairman of Parliament's Infrastructure and Physical Development Committee seeking an opportunity to appear before the Committee to outline their concerns.

I will continue to support residents in their pursuit of orderly, well-regulated and consultative development, and I urge the Chairman to grant these residents the opportunity to be heard and to give attention to their concerns.

CONCLUSION

Madam Speaker, as I close, I end where I started, with gratitude. While there is much left to be done, I am grateful for the opportunity to share our achievements in SE St Andrew with my constituents and indeed the entire country, through this debate. In the limited time afforded me in this House, I have given a snapshot of the state of the constituency. I thank all present today for your attention, and with humility, I invite all Jamaicans to visit my website julianjrobinson.com to see first-hand our commitment to the Accountability, Transparency and Participatory Democracy which defines my representation in South East St Andrew.

I thank you.