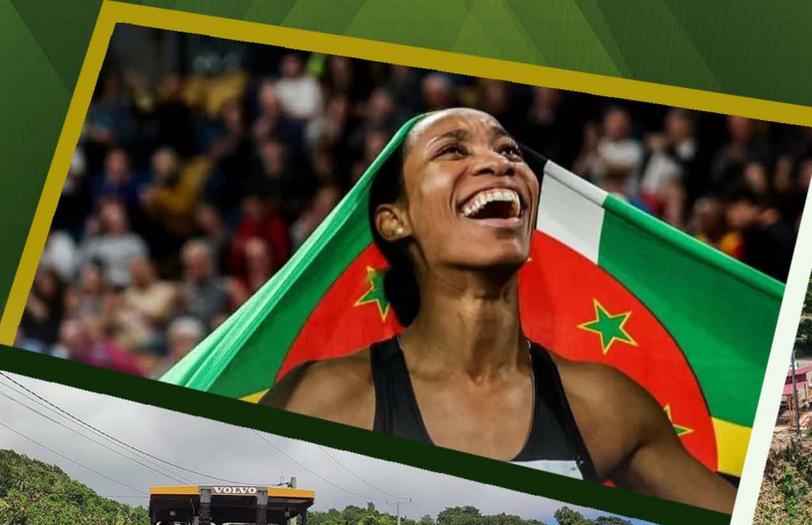




Government of Dominica

# 2024/2025 Budget

***PARTNERING TO BUILD THE PLATFORM FOR  
SUSTAINABLE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT***



Presented by

**Hon. Dr. Irving McIntyre**

Minister for Finance, Economic Development, Climate Resilience and Social Security

## INTRODUCTION

Mr. Speaker, Members of this Honourable House, Distinguished Guests, Fellow Dominicans at home and abroad, Good Morning.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to present the Budget Address for Fiscal Year 2024/2025, thankful for the Lord's continuous blessings, mercies and protection over our people and our nation. His grace has guided and sheltered us. We are not afraid because we take comfort and inspiration from the words of **Isaiah 41** that God is with us and that he will strengthen and help us.

It is with this confidence, Mr. Speaker, that we continue to chart a path towards a progressive future for our citizens within a global environment beset by unprecedented social and economic challenges.

We in the Caribbean, continue to be disproportionately impacted by climate change and external shocks. The wars in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, global health crises and the debilitating effects of disaster, undermine social stability and economic performance.

These major events are causing supply chain disruptions and increasing costs of transportation, making it difficult for small island developing states like Dominica to import essential goods at reasonable cost and contributing to inflation, which profoundly impacts the economy.

Mr. Speaker, climate change is an existential threat to our survival, impacting food security, health, and economic stability especially in our region. We need to look no further than Hurricane Beryl, an early-season Category 5 hurricane that wreaked havoc across many of our sister islands earlier this month. We express solidarity with the governments and people of the affected islands and extend heartfelt sympathies to the families who lost loved ones.

The devastation of property, displacement of people and loss of life and livelihoods are becoming all too common in a region bearing the brunt of a

crisis, not of its making. These increasingly severe storms carry significant financial risk for our already strained economies, and we have had to divert valuable resources to address consecutive shocks and mitigate against the impact of climatic events.

Mr. Speaker, although this destruction caused by climate change is not as a result of our own doing, we are the ones who have had to bear the brunt of the impact and cost of reconstruction at a time when development assistance to our countries is not as readily available as it once was.

Since 2015, Government has borrowed a total of EC\$673.0 million to respond to natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic, that is \$112.1 million for Tropical Storm Erika; \$244.1 million for Hurricane Maria; and \$316.8 million to assist the country to manage and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Notwithstanding these increasing financial burdens, we continue to shoulder the full weight of responsibility and shield our citizens from additional economic hardship.

Mr. Speaker, permit me at this time to update the Honourable House on our economic performance and outlook.

## **Economic Performance and Outlook**

Mr. Speaker, irrespective of the challenges, the Government has remained steadfast in its mission to manage the recovery, and I am pleased that the economy has rebounded. The International Monetary Fund reported that while the world economy grew by an estimated 3.2 percent in 2023, Dominica's economy saw growth of 4.7 percent during that same period.

This marks the third consecutive year of growth for the Dominican economy, following growth of 6.9 percent in 2021 and 5.6 percent in 2022. Additionally, the economy is projected to continue along its current trajectory with strong growth of 4.6 percent in 2024 plus at least 4.3 percent in 2025. This

performance is being driven by the government's ambitious public sector investment program, robust wholesale and retail trade, a steady rebound in tourism and increased agricultural production.

The IMF indicated that global inflation is expected to decrease from an average of 6.8 percent in 2023 to 5.9 percent in 2024 and 4.5 percent in 2025. Historically, Dominica's inflation has remained below global levels due to the substitutional effects of local production and consumption. Therefore, according to the IMF, inflation in Dominica was lower than the global level averaging 3.5 percent in 2023 and it is expected to continue falling to an average of 2.8 percent in 2024.

We are encouraged by the results of the IMF's assessment of the performance of the economy, and we do hope that this downward trajectory in inflation will be reflected in the cost of goods on supermarket shelves.

Mr. Speaker, in respect of the Government's fiscal performance, preliminary data indicates that there has been a further improvement. The primary balance shifted from a deficit of 0.8 percent at the end of June 2023 to a surplus of 0.6 percent of GDP as of June 30, 2024. This is mainly due to a favorable economic climate which impacted positively on tax revenues, and deliberate action by Government to contain and manage recurrent expenditure. Tax revenues increased by 3.1 percent over the previous year while recurrent expenditure declined by 3 percent.

Although tax revenues are expected to increase further by 3.3 percent a primary deficit of 8.7 percent is forecasted for Fiscal Year 2024/2025, mainly due to a significant rise in capital expenditure for agriculture, digitalization, housing, the Roseau Enhancement Project, and the East Coast Road. However, beyond this fiscal year, as these projects come to an end and capital expenditure reduces, we expect improvements in fiscal balances as revenues continue to grow.

There was an increase of 2.4 percent in total disbursed outstanding debt compared to the previous year. Central Government's debt is estimated at

EC\$1,507.4 million, while government-guaranteed debt is estimated at EC\$140.3 million. Total debt to GDP is estimated to be 89.4 percent, with Central Government debt to GDP at 81.7 percent.

Mr. Speaker, it is certainly not easy for our small State to overcome the impacts of successive natural disasters, a global pandemic, global economic slowdown, supply chain and transportation issues without it significantly affecting our fiscal position and fiscal space. Any objective observer will admit that Dominica under the leadership of this Government has done a remarkable job, in the circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to direct our efforts toward implementing programmes and projects which promote long-term economic growth, enhance social protection and human development, build resilience and preserve the environment—all of these are key factors for sustainable development. Despite significant progress in these areas, our work is not yet finished.

It is against this backdrop that I present the **Budget Proposal for Fiscal Year 2024/2025** under the theme “*Partnering to build the platform for sustainable growth and development.*” This Fiscal Year’s Budget Proposal will advance current programmes and projects, and at the same time pursue new economic initiatives.

## **FISCAL YEAR 2024/2025 BUDGET PROPOSAL**

### **Recurrent Expenditures**

Mr. Speaker, for Fiscal Year 2024/2025, I propose a total recurrent expenditure of \$679.4 million, including those provided by law. Table 1 below contains the details.

**Table 1: Recurrent Expenditure by Ministry/ Department**

<b>MINISTRY/DEPARTMENT</b>	<b>Total in (million)</b>
Office of the President	1.2
Integrity in Public Office Commission	0.5
Public and Police Service Commission	0.4
Legislature	1.2
Audit Department	1.1
Ministry of National Security and Legal Affairs	60.6
Elections	1.9
Office of the Prime Minister	10.4
Ministry of Finance, Economic Development, Climate Resilience and Social Security	296.3
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Blue and Green Economy	9.0
Ministry of Education, Human Resource Planning, Vocational Training and National Excellence	70.7
Ministry of Housing and Urban Development	6.2
Ministry of Health, Wellness and Social Services	81.9
Ministry of Environment, Rural Modernisation and Kalinago Upliftment	11.2
Tourism	20.6
Ministry of Culture, Youth, Sports and Community Development	12.8
Establishment, Personnel and Training Department	9.9
Ministry of Public Works, Public Utilities and the Digital Economy	55.0
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Business, Trade and Energy	22.8
Cabinet Office	3.5
Ministry of Labour, Public Service Reform, Social Partnership, Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development	2.2
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>679.4</b>

The five highest recurrent expenditure allocations are as follows:

1. The Ministry of Finance, Economic Development, Climate Resilience, and Social Security is to receive \$296.3 million or 43.6 percent of the total recurrent expenditure. Of this sum, \$126.8 million is allocated to debt services payments, \$46.1 million is earmarked for retiring benefits including gratuities, pensions, compassionate allowances and non-contributory pensions (the over-65 programme), while \$7.4 million has been set aside for the payment of insurance premiums to the

Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Programme to ensure adequate coverage against excess rainfall, earthquakes and tropical cyclones.

2. The Ministry of Health, Wellness and Social Services receives the second largest allocation of \$81.9 million or 12.1 percent of total recurrent expenditure. This government remains dedicated to promoting a healthy Dominica and will continue to invest in the health sector.
3. The third highest amount of \$70.7 million or 10.4 percent is allocated to the Ministry of Education, Human Resource Planning, Vocational Training and National Excellence.
4. An amount of \$60.6 million or 8.9 percent of the total is allocated to the Ministry of National Security and Home Affairs; and
5. The Ministry of Public Works will receive \$55.0 million or 8.1 percent.

The allocation for goods and services accounted for 35 percent or \$234.9 million, of total recurrent expenditure. The total budgeted for personal emoluments is \$167.1 million, or 25 percent. This amount takes into account increases in some of the allowances paid to public officers. The amount set aside for retirement benefits, transfers, and subsidies is \$144.6 million. That amount includes public assistance, grants, and payments to local, regional, and international entities.

Interest payments are expected at \$54.1 million, while debt amortization and contributions to the sinking fund are estimated at \$73.2 million.

### **Capital Expenditure**

Mr. Speaker, in respect of the Capital Estimates for the Fiscal Year 2024/2025, I propose a total capital expenditure of \$934.9 million. Table 2 provides a breakdown of capital expenditure by Ministry/Department.

**Table 2: Capital Expenditure by Ministry/ Department**

<b>MINISTRY/DEPARTMENT</b>	<b>Total in (million)</b>
Office of the President	0.7
Legislature	0.1
Ministry of National Security and Legal Affairs	4.3
Elections	0.8
Office of the Prime Minister	490.0
Ministry of Finance, Economic Development, Climate Resilience and Social Security	10.0
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Blue and Green Economy	52.5
Ministry of Education, Human Resource Planning, Vocational Training and National Excellence	22.8
Ministry of Housing and Urban Development	70.5
Ministry of Health, Wellness and Social Services	7.5
Ministry of Environment, Rural Modernisation and Kalinago Upliftment	41.2
Ministry of Tourism	17.2
Ministry of Culture, Youth, Sports and Community Development	11.8
Establishment, Personnel and Training Department	1.7
Ministry of Public Works, Public Utilities and the Digital Economy	164.8
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Business, Trade and Energy	32.8
Ministry of Labour, Public Service Reform, Social Partnership, Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development	6.5
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>934.9</b>

## **FOSTERING LONG TERM SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH**

### **Key Infrastructure to Enable Sustainable Growth and Expansion of the Economy**

Mr. Speaker, this Government has made substantial investments in infrastructure, a fact often taken for granted as we in Dominica have come to expect and demand nothing less. Our achievements are evident with the improvement in the quality of our road network, including community roads;

sea defense walls, bridges, contemporary school structures, modern health and wellness centres, new hospitals, police stations, sports facilities, housing developments; and the extension of the runway and night landing capabilities at Douglas-Charles airport. These developments, and many others, have been achieved notwithstanding repeated macroeconomic shocks and disasters; and have laid the foundation for the improved quality of life and economic growth that we currently enjoy.

This Government's stated intent to build a resilient, Dynamic Dominica, necessitates that we continue to be visionary in our approach. We continue to pursue initiatives designed to grow our economy and foster the economic well-being of our people. Several of the initiatives that we are pursuing are interlinked and will create numerous opportunities direct and indirect for our people.

Some of the obstacles to our development that are not external or climatic, have been linked for example to our limited air access, a small population, high cost of energy, and inefficient systems. We have sought systematically to address these matters.

We have several major transformative projects in the pipeline that are at various stages of development that will help improve our tourism product and significantly increase visitor arrivals, create markets for our agricultural produce, create opportunities in the renewable energy sector, reduce the cost of doing business, and create efficiencies through digitalisation.

These include the construction of an international airport, a marina, a new cargo port and a modern cruise village. We are rehabilitating our road network, enhancing the city of Roseau, providing cheaper, reliable renewable energy, and digitalizing Government processes and services.

Mr. Speaker, our flagship project is the **international airport**. This top priority project is progressing at a steady pace, and I am pleased to report that construction is ahead of schedule.

Three (3) of the four main box culvert crossings are now complete and over 6 million of the 24 million cubic meters of earthworks for the airstrip and landside buildings have been completed. By the end of this fiscal year, we expect to complete 80 percent of the earthworks and commence construction of the terminal and other ancillary buildings.

The new international airport is being built with a capacity to handle up to 500 000 passengers per year. I want us to think for a moment of what that could mean for Dominica. This will lead to increased visitor arrivals, higher hotel occupancy rates, and more business for all those who are involved in the tourism sector.

When this International Airport becomes operational, it shall become a hub for economic activity, generating jobs and stimulating local businesses and attracting investments. The International Airport will allow local businesses, including farmers, manufacturers and small businesses, with access to the global market.

There will also be significant positive spillover effects due to the greater demand for goods and services, benefiting our people and businesses as more money circulates in the economy.

Let us all recognize and support the pivotal role that the International Airport will play in shaping a brighter and more progressive and prosperous future for our country.

Government therefore continues to encourage every Dominican to prepare for the opportunities that will arise from this transformative project.

Mr. Speaker, another milestone infrastructure project, the **Cabrits Marina**, is about to commence. The Government has partnered with Range Developments, developers of the Intercontinental Dominica Cabrits Resort, for this project. The construction of the Marina Basin is estimated to take 12–18 months with dredging of the site to commence in August 2024.

Upon completion, the marina will offer a range of services to operators of catamarans, yachts including super yachts, and sport-fishers. This includes fuel supplies, vessel security for crew and guests, transportation services, food and beverage services and berthing slips.

The modern designs and amenities are expected to triple the number of yacht calls to Dominica, considering our central location in the Eastern Caribbean. The Cabrits Marina will entice yachties to make Dominica their home base due to our people's warm and welcoming disposition, our low crime rate and the ease of air travel to and from their country of residence that the new airport will bring.

This will result in a sharp, sustained increase in stay-over arrivals and hundreds of permanent jobs for Dominicans. The marina will generate revenue and foreign exchange for the country and additional income for the Dominicans who are already engaged in the yachting industry, both directly and indirectly.

The Marina will serve as a catalyst for economic growth and will stimulate the local economy and create new business opportunities and jobs for our people.

The government is also in the process of securing financing for the construction of the **new smart cargo port at Donkey Beach in Canefield**. With ongoing and planned investments and the anticipated sustainable growth in the economy, we need a cargo port capable of responding to increased trade. This new facility will be built to resilient standards to withstand climate effects and other environmental conditions that could negatively impact port operations and will be equipped with smart technology to improve efficiency and reduce clearance times.

A private developer is also undertaking preparatory works for the development of a new cruise village at the Woodbridge Bay Port. This village will cater for cruise ships, ferry services and duty-free shopping.

We envision that this duty-free shopping zone will be another source to draw foreign exchange and investment to our country, fostering a business-friendly environment for both large and small retailers. It will also create an avenue for our local entrepreneurs to access a wider, diverse international clientele to sell their quality products. The influx of tourists and locals seeking tax-free bargains will result in higher sales volumes and an overall boost for the economy. Our people can look forward to a range of job opportunities and prospects for business during the construction and operation of the Cruise Village.

Mr. Speaker, the four transformative projects that I have described, among others, will result in a surge of visitors, boosting trade and economic activity, and equally important, create more sustainable jobs for our people.

Mr. Speaker, roads serve as crucial arteries that connect people, places, and opportunities and their role in fostering economic growth, social integration, and overall development cannot be overstated. In any country, a well-developed road network reduces transportation costs, increases market accessibility, and boosts productivity.

We take pride in our efforts over the past years to develop a high-quality road network throughout the island. Our latest ongoing major project is the East Coast Road Rehabilitation—from Bois Diable to Hatton Garden via the Kalinago Territory. This Road is now 75 percent complete and has already spurred increased economic activity in that region. Access to essential services, work, and schools has improved; safety for road users is enhanced; and the value of the land has increased, representing opportunity and higher incomes for property owners in the area.

We thank the residents of Castle Bruce, Dixpas, Tranto, Morpo, Petite Soufriere, San Sauveur, Good Hope, Atkinson, and the Kalinago Territory for their patience and understanding during construction. I am sure that now the project is nearing completion they can appreciate and enjoy the comfort of a more robust and efficient road network.

Mr. Speaker we will commence two new road projects this year. I am pleased to inform the Honourable House that two local contractors have jointly won the tender for the rehabilitation of the **Loubiere to Grand Bay Road**. A contract will be awarded within the next two weeks and work will start by October this year. It is anticipated that this Project will enhance the resilience of this road and the safety of road users and attract more economic activity to that area.

Mr. Speaker, this Labour Party Government will transform the City of Roseau into a more dynamic commercial and residential hub. Last November, Parliament approved a loan of US\$41.0 million (EC\$110.7 million) for the continuation of the Roseau Enhancement Project. The planned improvements will beautify the city, alleviate traffic congestion, boost commercial activities, and enhance the comfort of residents, businesses, and visitors.

The designs to rehabilitate six streets, namely: River Street, Great George Street, King George V Street, Cork Street, Bath Road, and Independence Street, with new sidewalks and drainage systems, are complete.

We recognize the importance of this much-anticipated project in improving the quality of life of those who live and work in the city and assure our citizens that the Government is committed to its implementation and will minimize disruption as much as possible.

Mr. Speaker, water is critically important to everything that we do. It is crucial for maintaining health and wellbeing, and supporting livelihoods. The Government of Dominica therefore continues to collaborate closely with DOWASCO to strengthen the resilience and reliability of the island's water systems.

Delivering water to homes and businesses, especially given Dominica's challenging terrain, is a costly exercise. Despite the significant investments required to establish and restore access, particularly post Maria, we have

consistently shown our dedication to ensuring that every community in Dominica has access to potable water.

Last Fiscal Year we continued upgrades to Water Area-1—the largest water system, serving communities from Mero to Castle Comfort, which is approximately 45 percent of the population, along with businesses in our main commercial district—the city of Roseau. This project, which began in 2014 has so far cost \$33 million, with \$24 million financed through loans, while the Government of Dominica and DOWASCO contributed \$9.0 million.

A \$6.5 million pipeline replacement project was also completed to facilitate the development of the new East Coast Road.

In the current fiscal year, DOWASCO will commence the implementation of its Water Sector Strategic Development Plan (WSSDP) which aims to enhance resilience in four (4) major water systems, namely: Castle Bruce; Morne Jaune, Riviere Cyrique, and Grand Fond; Calibishie; and Coulibistrie, Salisbury and Grand Savanne systems. These upgrades are expected to cost \$36 million, with work scheduled to commence in October 2024 and projected for completion by March 2026. The project will be funded primarily by a grant from the Government of the United Kingdom.

Other major water projects to be implemented this year include:

1. Paix Bouche Water Enhancement Project funded by the Caribbean Development Bank, the Government of Dominica and DOWASCO to the tune of \$2.0 million; and
2. Upgrades to the Penville Water System and the Bense Water System at a cost of \$3.4 million, to be funded by the Government and DOWASCO.

Mr. Speaker, an important component of our growth strategy is the development of our **renewable energy sector**. We believe economic development will be driven by a reliable, clean, stable and reasonably priced

energy supply which will lower the cost of doing business and attract new green energy investment.

The Government of Dominica has made a strategic decision to invest in developing its geothermal potential, to produce clean energy at a reduced cost.

On December 5, 2023, Dominica achieved a significant milestone by entering into an agreement with Ormat Technologies for the financing, construction and operation of the Geothermal Power Plant. On July 10, 2024, the first batch of power plant equipment was delivered to the site at Laudat, initial civil works commenced on July 11 and commissioning is scheduled for the end of December 2025.

To facilitate the transition to renewable energy and reduce line losses, Dominica needs to upgrade its electricity transmission network. In June 2024, the Government of Dominica secured an EC\$104 million loan from the World Bank to fund the new transmission system from Laudat to Fond Cole.

These initiatives will significantly improve efficiency and ensure reliable electricity service for our citizens. Our journey to energy independence has been lengthy and expensive but we are on the right track and close to completing this major project. We are also exploring the geothermal potential in the North of the country as a means of spurring industrial development on a large scale and we will provide more information on that in the coming months.

Mr. Speaker, this Government has clearly outlined its plans for **Digital Transformation** in Dominica. We recognize that a key component of resilience and sustainable development is leveraging technology to enhance access and improve service delivery in both the public and private sectors. Over the past few years, we have witnessed a significant shift in how business is conducted within Dominica and internationally, driven by the introduction of new digital technologies.

To capitalize on these opportunities, the Government continues to build our citizens' capacities to operate in a digitalized environment. This year, we have provided training for micro, small, and medium business owners and managers to sell products online, manage online content, and effectively use social media.

We believe digital solutions can help businesses scale up their operations, reduce costs, and improve customer interaction. This week, the Government awarded grants to seventy-seven (77) small businesses in various sectors, including IT, music, retail, services, agro-processing, and food and beverage, to support the digitalization of their operations.

Digital Transformation is about innovation, efficiency, and enhanced customer experiences. In this spirit, the Government is pleased to announce the launch of the Government of Dominica e-Services Portal, accessible at [eservices.gov.dm](http://eservices.gov.dm). This web and mobile portal allow the public to submit applications, make payments, and access information on over ninety (90) services. The portal is available 24 hours seven days a week, enabling users to apply and pay for birth, marriage, and death certificates, marriage licenses, permits and other services from anywhere in the world. This streamlined approach to conducting business will result in savings, convenience and more efficient time management for our citizens.

Other initiatives to be undertaken during this Fiscal Year include the implementation of an e-Office and Document Management System and a Digital Signature Framework for the Public Service. A contract for the design and installation of these two systems has already been awarded. These systems will improve administrative efficiencies, lead to significant cost savings, and contribute to environmental sustainability.

In addition, we are in the process of identifying a vendor to provide a digital system that will allow the Government to make payments, particularly for social assistance, via cards instead of cash, eliminating the need for bulk cash processing. Under this system, recipients will receive cards, and

payments will be directly loaded onto them, offering a more secure and convenient means of payment.

While the Government focuses on digital transformation within the Public Sector, we call on the private sector to partner with us to build the digital economy. We encourage businesses to adopt digital payment methods, including mobile banking, credit and debit card payments, and online payments. Utilizing digital marketing, e-commerce platforms, and mobile applications to interact with customers can expand reach and increase revenue.

To support these initiatives, the government is establishing a formal legislative framework to facilitate the digital economy and is taking measures to enhance cybersecurity for user protection.

## **Development and Expansion of our Industries**

Mr. Speaker, for Dominica to realise the sustainable development goals and the resilience targets envisioned by this Government, we must continue to expand existing productive sectors and diversify our economy by introducing and facilitating new industries. Dominica is endowed with numerous natural resources that we must add value to and market to Dominicans and globally for financial returns.

One of the main contributors to Dominica's development and growth is **Tourism**. During the Fiscal Year 2023/2024 visitor arrivals increased by more than 4 percent compared to the previous year, despite global challenges and airlift issues.

In the past twelve months, Dominica has received numerous accolades, including being named one of Reader's Digest's 20 Best Honeymoon Destinations, Travel + Leisure's 50 Best Places to Travel for three consecutive years, BBC's 10 Sustainable Travel Destinations to Visit in 2024, and the New York Times' 52 Greatest Places to Travel in 2024. This month, Dominica also ranked number 5 on Travel + Leisure's list of the 25

Best Islands to Visit Around the World. Dominica is the only Caribbean Island in the top 5.

These recognitions, along with those I reported last year, highlight the success of your government's significant investments in the tourism sector, which are helping to solidify Dominica's status as a leading sustainable tourism destination in the world.

We continue to improve and expand on our product offerings and during this Fiscal Year, Government will rehabilitate segments 4, 11, and 13 of the Waitukubuli National Trail and begin the construction of a \$1.5 million Tourism Reception facility at Champagne in Pointe Michel. This modern centre will feature vending units, changing rooms, lockers, spa services, restaurants, bars, and open green spaces for recreation, all in an effort to enhance visitor experience.

Mr. Speaker we are planning to upgrade all of our tourism sites on a phased basis and this Year we will finalize designs to transform three other major tourism sites—the Trafalgar Falls, Emerald Pool and Titou Gorge. The designs will focus on making the sites more accessible and user friendly while maintaining the characteristics of their natural environment.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report that the **Cable Car** project in the Roseau Valley is progressing satisfactorily. This is an important project that is part of the overall vision to increase the variety of activities available to be experienced in the Nature Isle and in keeping with our goal to make our sites accessible to all, regardless of age or physical ability.

By the end of 2025 the world's longest Cable Car will be ready to transport visitors over the breath taking and scenic tourist sites in the Roseau Valley. More than 200 people are employed on this project, many from the Roseau Valley and at least 100 people will be permanently employed when it is commissioned.

Mr. Speaker, the Cable Car's operation will enhance the tourist experience in Dominica and generate increased revenue, particularly for the people in the Roseau Valley.

While we await the completion of the International Airport we continue our efforts at improving and increasing airlift to the island. The extension of the Douglas Charles Airport runway is almost complete and will improve connectivity and access to key markets.

It is a matter of some satisfaction to us that this extension is necessary to respond to the heightened demand for airlift into Dominica as Dominica has become one of the most popular destinations in the Caribbean. Extending the runway will allow larger aircraft to land, attracting more stay over tourists and business travellers to the island, which will boost tourism revenue. We are constantly in discussions with other airlines to secure more flights from key markets.

To this end, Sunrise Airways made its inaugural landing in May 2024, while WINAIR has launched flights between Dominica and Martinique, and American Airlines has added daily flights between Dominica and Miami during peak seasons. With the extension and grooving of the Douglas-Charles runway we are looking forward to successful completion of negotiations for a new direct flight from the United States starting this Fiscal Year.

Mr. Speaker, to complement the major investments that we are making in attracting more visitors to our shores, we are also addressing the increased demand for accommodation that will arise. We expect that within the next two years, five new internationally branded hotels, constructed under Citizenship by Investment Program, will be completed.

The combination of all of these investments will help us achieve our goal of attracting 500,000 stay-over visitors and 1 million cruise visitors by 2030.

Mr. Speaker, it should be noted that these goals cannot be achieved solely with investment by Public Sector. “Tourism is Everybody’s Business” is a familiar theme, which means that every citizen must play a role in the success of the tourism sector.

However, this task requires residents to play their part. Owners of derelict vehicles, garages, shops, stalls, businesses, and homes along our streets, community roads, and highways must adopt their surroundings to ensure they are kept clean and green.

Mr. Speaker, each of us has a duty and responsibility as a citizen or resident of Dominica to protect our environment. We need to engage in better waste management practices. We need to engage in beautification and cleanliness activities in order to preserve the environment of this Nature Island.

Even those of us who think we have nothing to gain from tourism, may not realise that when the taxi and tour operators make money they can buy more from our shops. If we have more visitors, our hotels, restaurants and bars will have more customers and the government gets more revenue to improve on and provide more services.

In order to cement ourselves as a premier tourism destination we must ensure quality customer service throughout Dominica as well as keep our surroundings clean and beautiful at all times.

We must not only rely on the wonderful work of the NEP in cleaning and beautifying our communities, but we should take personal responsibility to ensure that we too play our part by planting flowers and trees and disposing of our garbage responsibly.

Mr. Speaker, another sector which is expected to receive significant benefits from Government’s ongoing investments in **agriculture**. That is why this Government is continuing its efforts to boost **agriculture's** contribution to GDP to \$700 million by 2030. We believe there is significant potential for

growth in this sector, driven by the increasing global demand for food security.

We will continue to implement our plans as articulated in the two previous budget addresses, focusing on increasing agricultural production, enhancing agro-processing output, improving Dominica's brand, and expanding our market share locally, regionally, and internationally.

We are investing strategically in developing robust crop production systems, including expanding the stock of high-quality planting materials to achieve consistently higher yields and quality. Over the past year, we distributed more than 390,000 plantlets and seedlings with the assistance of the Chinese Agricultural Technical Mission and in the next twelve months, the Government plans to provide at least 140,000 banana and tree crop planting materials to farmers.

The recently commissioned \$11.4 million Dominica-China Agricultural Science Complex Building, gifted by the People's Republic of China, features a tissue culture lab capable of producing 500,000 seedlings annually. This lab will utilize cutting-edge technology to develop disease-free planting materials and includes a seed cold storage room for establishing a national seed bank as part of our food security and post-disaster resilience plans. The Government and People of Dominica express our profound appreciation to the Government and People of China for this very timely gift.

Additionally, we are rehabilitating plant propagation facilities and introducing new crop varieties at the Chinese Agricultural Technical Mission at One Mile to diversify and increase output; and also, a citrus certification facility, with a capacity to propagate 50,000 citrus plants annually, will be constructed at Londonderry this year.

To further support crop production, new irrigation and water storage systems are being commissioned at various locations. Ongoing projects include the installation of a new system at Salisbury which will benefit over 60 farmers.

Mr. Speaker, as you are aware Government established a Revolving Fund to assist DEXIA to meet its commitments to farmers and provide a credit facility to hucksters to facilitate increased production and exports. This facility has restored farmers' confidence in the agricultural sector through a guaranteed market for their produce. During the period June 2023 to June 2024 \$1,656,752.40 was drawn down from the facility. This facility has enabled DEXIA to purchase and pay farmers within a 48-hour window after purchase.

Significantly, bay oil valued at about \$300,000 was purchased, restoring faith among producers and reinforcing the Government's commitment as a facilitator connecting producers to the market. DEXIA has also upheld the Government's commitment to support import substitution by assuring white potato farmers a confirmed, hassle-free market for their produce.

We have secured markets for a variety of crops, in particular, plantains, dasheen and passionfruit. This year DEXIA will begin entering into contracts for consistent supply of these produce.

Government has engaged a consultant, whose main responsibility is to find market for Dominica's produce. Therefore, it is envisaged that by the end of the Fiscal Year, additional opportunities will be secured.

In livestock production, our immediate goals are to reduce Dominica's poultry and meat imports by 30-40 percent, increase exports of fresh animal products, and achieve protein security by 2030.

Mr. Speaker, in the past year, we expended \$5 million to subsidize materials and labour for 170 beneficiaries to construct livestock structures. Ninety-three (93) of these structures have been completed. We also completed the rehabilitation of the Central Livestock Farm.

Over the next two years, the Government will implement the Sheep and Goat Development Programme with investments in artificial insemination, embryo transfer, silvopasture, pelletizing feeds, pasture improvement, and fencing.

We will also expand broiler production with key investments such as the reconstruction of the abattoir at a cost of \$6.5 million, construction of an animal feed mill, and development of local hatcheries. These investments are expected to increase livestock production thereby decreasing our import of meat.

Additionally, this Government recognizes the importance of the apiculture industry. In this regard, 15 farmers will receive 100 hives to increase the production of honey by 100 percent. This will ensure a more reliable supply of honey for consumption as well as for the manufacturing of by-products of honey.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of Dominica committed last year to allocate funds annually for the rehabilitation of feeder roads, and we are honoring that promise.

In the past year, we repaired the Macaton, Mopo and Chatwell *roads*. This Fiscal Year, two allocations under the Ministry of Public Works Capital Budget will address the most challenging sections of farm roads serving the highest number of productive farmers, such as, the Carholme Road; Petit Macoucherie in Salisbury; Station Road in Laplaine; Dal'fondsie in Grand Coulibrie; Neba/Atlee Road in Layou Park; and Captain Bruce Feeder Road in Marigot.

We continue to work to address the concerns of the farmers in relation to farm labour. At present, a Farm Labour strategy is being finalized. It will include a migrant component, similar to the programme implemented by the Government of Canada; as well as an entrepreneurship component and a mechanization component which will include skills training.

Mr. Speaker, permit me at this juncture to update the Honourable House on the progress we have made in the development of the **Blue Economy**. We

are attracting investments from both the public and private sectors to realize increased benefits and diversify the economy.

In fishing, we are improving infrastructure and providing training, vessels and equipment to fisher folks. \$3.2 million has already been spent on the training of boatbuilders, construction of molds and prototypes as well as procurement of materials for the construction of 50 boats. During this fiscal year contracts will be awarded to boatbuilders for the construction of at least 30 of these boats.

Furthermore, we will enhance the fish landing sites at Bioche, Dublanc, Mahaut, Scotts Head, Stowe, and San Sauveur, while the fish vending areas at Fond Cole and Newtown will be upgraded.

Mr. Speaker, we have traditionally focused on the fisheries and tourism aspects of the Blue Economy, but since 2022, this government has outlined a clear path to capitalize on the new opportunities within the sector.

One key initiative is the establishment of the world's first Sperm Whale Reserve. To this end, we are ensuring all prerequisites are in place. We have determined the exact location for the Reserve, covering an area of 923.3 km<sup>2</sup>—approximately 12 nautical miles off the West coast of Dominica in the Caribbean Sea, representing 3.2 percent of Dominica's Exclusive Economic Zone. This location was selected based on an analysis of critical areas for the whales with minimal impact on shipping and trade.

We have completed stakeholder consultations on the draft legislation and are incorporating their feedback. This legislation provides for the creation of a Sperm Whale office, a new licensing regime, and a detailed Sperm Whale Management Plan. We expect to present the final draft legislation to the House by October 2024, and to establish the Reserve by November 1, 2024, in time for the 2024/2025 Tourist Season starting in October 2024.

Additionally, preparations are underway to establish the Global Regenerative Climate Research Institute (GRCRI) at the Dominica State College. This

marine institute, in collaboration with Common Earth, UK, will focus on research and development in aquaculture, mariculture, blue technologies, coral and marine life research and restoration, and scientific research.

Mr. Speaker, another major initiative within the blue economy is the development and commercialization of seamoss. Although seamoss is a vital component of the blue economy, its full potential remains untapped in Dominica. There is potential to produce seamoss on a large scale for both local consumption and export.

Therefore, the Government has begun increasing investments to boost seamoss production. Last fiscal year we provided equipment, training and planting material to seamoss farmers. This year, we plan to further increase seamoss production by identifying new production sites and producers.

We are currently supporting the establishment of an ex-situ coral nursery in Soufriere in collaboration with the Nature Isle Dive Watersports Operation and Oceans Forward. This coral restoration initiative is an adaptive measure to mitigate some coastal impacts.

This is a timely intervention given the impacts of climate change on coastal resources. Rising sea temperatures, sedimentation, coral bleaching, coral diseases, and invasive species threaten not only the livelihoods of coastal communities but also the ecosystems that sustain them.

Mr. Speaker, we are encouraged by the quantity and quality of Dominican products in the market. Visit any supermarket in the city and you will see the wide array of local products on the shelves. We commend our agroprocessors for their innovative spirit and will continue to assist them to expand and grow their enterprises.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to agriculture production, to achieve the \$700 million agriculture contribution to GDP by 2030, Dominica must enhance **its agro-processing and value-added capabilities**. There is potential for more local

produce to be processed and packaged or used as raw materials for the manufacturing of new products for local and export markets.

The Government has been working with agro processors to increase production. We have provided grants, equipment, loans through the AID Bank and duty-free concessions to help reduce the cost of production and increase their efficiency and competitiveness. More support will be provided to agro-processors in this Fiscal Year.

In addition to this support, we are responding to the request for space for agro-processors to operate. To this end, Government, with the assistance of the Caribbean Development Bank, is finalizing the Terms of Reference for the design of a production facility for agro processors. In the interim, an amount of \$1.0 million has been allocated in this Year's budget to support rental of hubs in at least two locations to provide additional space for small agro-processors to increase their production.

Mr. Speaker, our investments in agriculture and agro processing will not reap the anticipated benefits without public input. We are calling on all Dominicans to "EAT WHAT WE GROW." Let us make informed choices about the food we consume and prioritize purchasing local products. Consuming local produce and locally manufactured products increases demand within the agricultural sector, resulting in greater benefits for our farmers and the economy.

We also encourage farmers to adopt sustainable farming methods, best practices for food safety, and ensure reliability and consistency of supply to markets. We are creating an enabling environment and supportive framework for the advancement of the agricultural sector but will need the participation of all stakeholders to meet our goals for food and nutrition security.

Mr. Speaker, Government continues to support micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) through strategic partnerships and innovative

programs. We aim to create a conducive environment for entrepreneurs to thrive, build wealth, and drive economic prosperity.

In addition to the training, technical advice, marketing support we have provided access to financing through two critical facilities—loans from the AID Bank as well as guarantees for loans taken under the Eastern Caribbean Partial Guarantee Programme which is offered locally by the National Bank of Dominica.

Furthermore, last year we introduced a fiscal incentives licensing programme similar to that which exists for large businesses. Under this Programme, MSMEs are able to benefit from duty-free concessions for importing equipment, raw materials, and supplies. Interested MSMEs may apply through the Small Business Unit.

### **Establishment of A Medicinal Cannabis Industry**

Mr. Speaker, the Government of Dominica is committed to the development of comprehensive legislation that allows for safe access to cannabis products for medicinal and therapeutic use while creating economic opportunities for growers and processors of the cannabis plant.

In 2022, the Government demonstrated its commitment to formalizing this sector by appointing a National Task Force to review existing legislation and develop a regulatory framework for the controlled distribution of cannabis and its various by-products.

A consultant legal draftsman has been engaged to draft the legislation required to provide the solid legal foundation and framework necessary to enable Dominica to fully capitalize on and benefit from the economic potential of the growing medicinal cannabis industry.

Mr. Speaker, upon the submission and passage of this legislation through Parliament, we will proceed with the development of a facility for the regulated cultivation and processing of cannabis by-products for export including oils, beauty and skin care products. This initiative aims to create a

sustainable industry with significant potential for generating revenue, creating jobs, and attracting investment opportunities.

Also in this Fiscal Year, we will establish a Cannabis Authority and appoint a Board of Directors to oversee and manage the Cannabis Industry. To assist and to guide us through the launching of this new industry, we will engage Dr. Machel Emanuel, a Dominican born expert on Cannabis, as our consultant adviser. Dr Emanuel has provided similar advice to several other countries.

## **SOCIAL PROTECTION AND PEOPLE DEVELOPMENT**

Mr. Speaker, I want to reassure the socially vulnerable people of Dominica that we have allocated funds to sustain all of the Government's social programs. These include the Public Assistance Programme, the Foster Care Programme, support for juveniles in conflict with the law, the Centenarian Programme, the Non-Contributory Pension for those 65 and older, the Yes We Care Programme, textbook scheme, uniform allowance, school transfer grants and the school feeding programme.

Our extensive portfolio of social assistance programs is unparalleled in the history of Dominica. As a compassionate, people-centered administration, we will continue to assist the socially vulnerable. This is a duty we uphold, a commitment that aligns with our values, and we will not abandon our responsibility to protect the vulnerable.

During the last Fiscal Year, we handed over 249 homes. This year, Mr. Speaker, we will be handing over an additional 361 homes to citizens in communities across the island.

This is to ensure that our citizens have decent homes and can feel secure during severe weather. This is in line with our policy of social protection and people-centered development to enhance the quality of life and standard of living of every Dominican.

Notwithstanding our progress in increasing Dominica's resilient housing stock for the vulnerable, the demand for homeownership nationally remains high. In the last fiscal year, the Government sold 50 residential lots at various locations. In this financial year government will make available for sale 163 lots at concessionary rates at Jimmit, Hillsborough Gardens, Cotton Hill, Union Estate, Canefield East and Cabana View, formerly known as Jumbie Piece near Wesley.

We also await Physical Planning Division's approval for the Future Housing Development at Warner. The banks and the credit unions have agreed to give special consideration offering favorable mortgage rates and conditions. This project underscores our dedication to creating sustainable housing solutions for young professionals, public officers, and Dominicans living abroad.

I encourage our citizens, especially the youth, to actively participate in this ongoing housing revolution by investing in land and homeownership. Do not shy away from taking a mortgage to build a home, which can also offer the opportunity for a second income through rental. This approach will help create generational wealth and contribute to the growth and stability of our communities.

Mr. Speaker, we will all agree that housing is more than just four walls and a roof; it is the cornerstone of stability, security, and a catalyst for growth and prosperity. Safe and reliable housing provides a solid foundation for individuals and families to build better lives and contribute meaningfully to society.

With this in mind, the Government has been focusing on the relocation of communities impacted by disaster to ensure the safety and security of residents. Of the housing units to be constructed this fiscal year, thirty-five will be built in the first phase of a new development site in Castle Bruce to relocate the communities of Petite Soufriere, San Sauveur, and Good Hope to a safer location. This Project will commence in the last quarter 2024. In

addition, designs have been submitted to the Physical Planning Division for the relocation of Campbell residents.

Our investment in housing development has stimulated economic growth, creating jobs for architects, engineers, contractors, construction workers, and suppliers while driving demand for materials, services, and goods.

By prioritizing housing as a crucial part of our social and economic strategy, we are fostering stronger, healthier, and more equitable communities.

Mr. Speaker, Dominica's **education sector** remains a top priority for this Government. We are building a modern education system that meets the demands of 21st-century students, empowering young people to be active and successful participants in an increasingly competitive global environment.

To this end, we are providing our children with every opportunity to excel in the classroom. A crucial aspect of effective learning is the provision of clean, modern, child-friendly spaces for students to reach their full potential.

This Fiscal Year, we commenced the highly anticipated construction of six schools funded by the Government of the People's Republic of China. Construction of the Goodwill Secondary School is progressing rapidly, with the first and second floors of the classroom block nearing completion. The foundations of the technical block and canteen are complete and excavation work on the administrative block will begin this week.

This Secondary School will be established as a Center of Excellence for Technical Vocational Education and Training, aiming to create a cadre of skilled and empowered youth capable of contributing to economic development.

The Center of Excellence will include facilities for training delivered by skilled professionals in auto mechanics, woodworking, garment production, air condition and refrigeration installation and repair, electricity and electronics

and home management, among others. We also hope to foster partnerships with businesses and organizations to facilitate on-the-job learning experiences.

Foundation work is at an advanced stage at the Thibaud and Bellevue Chopin Primary Schools, while preliminary works are ongoing at Calibishie, Sineku, and Tete Morne.

As previously announced, the Thibaud Primary School will serve as a center for students with special needs, ensuring they receive dedicated instruction in a supportive and effective environment, enabling students to reach their full potential. This special needs centre will provide individualized attention and specialized curriculum and resources.

The Government is committed to reforming the education system to better prepare students with the diverse skills needed to leverage new opportunities and thrive in a changing global environment.

Efforts to enhance Early Childhood Development continue with funding from the OECS Pearl Project. Upgrades have been completed at the Kelleb Laurent and Salybia Primary Schools. These Early Childhood Development rooms now include washrooms, office space for teachers, and new furniture. The refurbishment has thus far cost \$220,000. Ongoing works at the Bagetelle Primary will soon be followed by upgrades at Castle Bruce and Jones Beaupierre Primary. A new Early Childhood Centre at the Baroness Patricia Scotland Primary School, funded by the Maria Holder Foundation, is complete.

Mr. Speaker, to provide increased access to quality education, we are constructing a new, modern and conducive Dominica Grammar School—the largest Secondary school in the Roseau Catchment Area with a proud legacy of accomplished graduates who have made significant contributions to the development of our country.

The state-of-the-art Dominica Grammar School will be completed this year and will comprise new classroom blocks, an auditorium, and an administrative block as well as refurbishment of the existing Classroom blocks A and B.

Last fiscal year, renovation work on the Block C Classrooms at the Dominica State College was completed. Renovation work, at a cost of \$2.7 million, is ongoing on classrooms, offices, and hallways of Blocks A and B, with completion expected in time for the reopening of the new semester. This is part of the government's commitment for the comprehensive rehabilitation of the Dominica State College including the revamping of the Agriculture and Auto mechanic programmes, establishment of a hospitality institute, and improvement in accommodation for both teachers and staff to ensure we have a more conducive environment for learning and success.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to emphasize to support the Government's investment in education, we must also emphasize the shared responsibility of teachers, parents, and students in the success of the education system.

Mr. Speaker, it would be remiss of us to discuss **sports** in the parliament today without acknowledging the outstanding performances of our national heroes, Kavem Hodge and Alick Athanaze, in the ongoing test series against England.

Kavem Hodge has demonstrated tenacity, discipline and impressive skill; and his accomplishments, alongside his friend and teammate, Alick Athanaze, have brought immense pride and joy to the people of Dominica and the Caribbean.

We extend our heartfelt congratulations to both of them and are confident that the sky is the limit for these two Dominican cricketing superstars. Their continued success is not only a source of national pride but also a beacon of inspiration for aspiring athletes, proving that Dominica can indeed produce top-level sports professionals.

Earlier this year, we also witnessed the impressive performance of young Stephan Pascal, who captained the West Indies Under-19 team during the International Cricket Council Youth Cup in South Africa.

Addison James secured bronze in the Under-20 Boy's category at the CARIFTA Games. Dominica also won the Boys and Girls Basketball and Boys' Volleyball at the Windward Islands Schools Games, contributing to our overall second-place finish. Additionally, Dominica placed third in the Regional Under-16 Netball Tournament, and Dennick Luke won a bronze medal in the Under-23 800m race at the North American, Central American, and Caribbean Athletics Association Championship in July 2023.

Dominica shone again on the international stage earlier this year when triple jumper Thea Lafond won our first Gold Medal at the World Indoor Athletics Championship in Glasgow, Scotland.

There is every indication Mr. Speaker, that Thea Lafond is on course to medal at the Paris Olympics and we send her best wishes from the Government and people of Dominica for success at these all-important games.

We extend our congratulations to these young achievers and the many others who have excelled in the past year.

As a demonstration of our commitment to advancing sports in Dominica and helping more of our youth achieve similar sporting glory, the Government has established the National Sports Council and appointed former elite international cricket umpire Billy Doctrove as Chair. This Council will be tasked with improving sports management, reviewing current sports legislation, and finalizing a comprehensive national sports policy.

We are also continuing to make significant investments in sports infrastructure across our island, including a project to install lighting systems on eight playing fields. So far, lights have been installed at Mahaut, Vieille

Case, Grand Fond, Bellevue Chopin, and Anse De Mai—while work continues on the Glanvillia, Center-Grand Bay, and Soufriere playing fields.

The government is upgrading the Wotten Waven, Woodford Hill, playing fields and constructing new outdoor hard courts in Penville, Portsmouth and Laplaine. Additionally, designs are being finalized for the construction of an indoor court in Portsmouth and this year, we will undertake upgrades to the Delices Playing Field and the Trafalgar Basketball Facility.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to emphasize that our investments in sports infrastructure are not just about the physical structures; they are about fostering healthier and more connected communities.

We must actively use these facilities. Let us not allow these investments to go to waste. Engaging in activities such as exercise groups and family sports days can strengthen community bonds and promote positive physical and mental health.

The rise of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in Dominica is a serious concern. Conditions like diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease are becoming more prevalent. Regular physical activity is a proven method to combat these ailments. By utilizing our sports facilities, we can encourage healthier lifestyles and reduce the incidence of NCDs, thereby fostering a more productive nation.

Mr. Speaker, all of us are aware, this government has been relentless in its quest to ensure **health and wellness** for all citizens. This is evident in the significant sums invested in health infrastructure, equipment, supplies and human resources.

We are thankful to God that this Dominica Labour Party Government has been able to build 15 new state-of-the-art health and wellness facilities throughout the island over the past five years. This includes two modern hospitals outfitted with cutting edge equipment on par with many large countries across the world.

In addition to these new amenities, Government has hired a number of specialists to enhance the quality of existing services as well as offer a variety of new health services which were not previously available in Dominica. For example, we have engaged a neurosurgeon. As a result, neurological surgeries are now being performed at the Dominica China Friendship Hospital and we have established a new neuro outpatient clinic. Other new medical interventions and services are available in cardiology, radiology, anaesthesia, ophthalmology, and vascular surgery and circulatory conditions.

In the case of cardiology and radiology, the new services are as a direct result of capacity building of clinical and clinical support staff through a technical agreement between the Governments of Dominica and the People's Republic of China.

Another new service which was introduced last fiscal year is nutritional and dietary counselling to patients on the medical ward. Patients are sensitized on proper diet for their medical conditions and a meal plan is prepared for patients upon discharge.

Mr. Speaker, these deliberate and targeted investments in health have resulted in improved health services as well as a more aesthetically pleasing and comfortable environment for the patients, families and staff. It is important to note Mr. Speaker,—that the Government has delivered these technologically advanced and costly medical services to the public at no additional charge.

Notwithstanding the significant improvements we have made, there are some other critical areas which the Government is addressing to further enhance patient outcomes as well as the patient and family experience when receiving care at our facilities—I speak specifically here about:

- a. New laws to better regulate health services including regulation of health practitioners;

- b. Establishment of more appropriate organizational sub-structures to manage and supervise day-to-day patient care;
- c. Strengthening of human resources including more training and better compensation for doctors, nurses and other service providers, and engagement of more providers;
- d. An integrated IT system which will provide secure gathering and storing of important patient information and making this information readily available to medical personnel engaged in providing care to the respective patients; and
- e. A better system, supported by technology, to manage the procurement and distribution of medicine and supplies.

I have been advised by the Minister for Health that five new health related bills have been finalized after consultation with numerous stakeholders and these bills will be taken to the House for consideration no later than October this year:--

- a) A Medical Profession Bill and a Nursing Profession Bill which will provide a more up to date framework for doctors and nurses to operate. Importantly, it will require them to engage in continuous learning so that patients can benefit from new advances in medicine and top quality care;
- b) A Pharmacy Bill and a Laboratory Bill will provide a strong regulatory framework to facilitate oversight of the operations of pharmacies and labs and ensure that the required standards are kept both at public and private facilities; and
- c) A digital Health Bill, will among other things, provide for the automation of health records and the necessary security requirements to support this automation.

This new regulatory framework is expected to greatly contribute to improvement in services as health care providers, patients and families will operate within the prescribed standards and requirements.

To improve patient care and outcomes, increase efficiency, and to acknowledge the special skills of our nurses by providing greater

opportunities for upward mobility, Government has approved a new staffing structure for the nursing service. This new structure, which will take effect from January 1, 2025, will include a Chief Nursing Officer; a Director of Hospital Nursing Services; two Deputy Directors for Hospital Nursing Services; and a Director for Public Health Nursing Services.

Staff Nurses will now be classified as Registered Nurse 1 and Registered Nurse 2 and Nursing Assistants will now be classified as Licensed Practical Nurse 1 and Licensed Practical Nurse 2. A new level of Senior Family Nurse Practitioner has also been created. Furthermore, new positions have been created for the following specializations - Pediatric Nurse, Critical Care Nurse, Oncology Nurse, Orthopedic Nurse, Geriatric Nurse and Nurse Anesthetist as well as for support services, including Operating Room Scrub Aide and Dialysis Aide.

To ensure that the new structure achieves the desired objective, we have decided that all public sector nurses will remain employed by Central Government and be available for assignment throughout the State's healthcare system. This will facilitate greater flexibility in the assignment of nurses.

Mr. Speaker, our next action is to implement a new structure for medical services. Government is currently reviewing a proposal which was prepared by our specialist doctors assigned to the Dominica Hospitals Authority. Once this exercise is complete, we intend to approve and implement the new structure during this fiscal year.

Another major advancement in health—the new Health Information Management System, will begin very shortly. An EC\$15.4 million contract has been awarded for the design, supply, and installation of a Health Management and Information System. This system aims to revolutionize and modernize the operations of the health care services in Dominica. Patients' records will be stored electronically and be readily available to all health care providers within our hospitals and health centres. This new system will

facilitate quicker, more efficient care and ultimately better patient experience and outcomes.

In addition, the system will facilitate the generation of medical reports and payment of bills. A stock management system to facilitate the procurement, distribution and monitoring of the stock of medicines and other supplies will also be a feature of this new IT system.

Mr. Speaker, while we await the implementation of this new Health Management IT system, Government has taken steps to strengthen the system of procurement and distribution of medical supplies.

We invited a team from the OECS Pharmaceuticals Procurement Division to undertake an assessment of our procurement and distribution systems. Several recommendations were made and have since been implemented. I am happy to report that the OECS has advised that our procurement system has met all acceptable standards including the availability of the approved medicines and supplies. Similar monitoring missions will be conducted at least once a year.

Mr. Speaker, we will continue to make strategic investments to provide quality healthcare services to our population. However, as a medical doctor and a former Minister for Health I wish to remind each of us, that our health begins with us.

The high incidence of NCDs places a significant social, economic and financial burden on our society. It causes a strain on the healthcare system, affects family life, and impacts the overall development of our country as more of our people become incapacitated or succumb to these illnesses.

To this end, with effect from September 1, 2024, Government will increase excise tax on sugary drinks by \$1.00 per litre, and alcohol and tobacco by 75 cents per litre and per kilogram respectively. We must take action to help reduce on the high incidence of NCDs in our country.

Let us as a people decide from today to act more responsibly and give greater attention to our wellness and wellbeing so that we can live healthier and God willing, longer lives.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize the vital role that human resource in the **public sector** plays in developing our economies, building resilience, and delivering effective services to the public. Our commitment to public and police officers remains a top priority for this government.

We know that job security is foremost in the minds of our officers. We are pleased that in the last financial year, a total of 292 officers in the public and police were appointed. Congratulations to all of the appointees including 71 teachers and 59 nurses.

Additionally, we implemented Phase 1 of the Organizational Review and Reclassification (ORR) of the Public Service last year. This phase introduced a revised salary structure, leading to varying salary increases for over 2,900 public and police officers. As a result of the job evaluation, 73 positions were upgraded, allowing some officers to move up to three levels on their salary scale. These changes, which took effect from September 1, 2023, resulted in a monthly wage bill increase of \$1.2 million, totalling \$14 million annually.

This is a clear indication that notwithstanding global economic challenges, this government continues to invest heavily in its public officers.

This year, Phase 2 of the ORR will begin, focusing on implementing recommendations regarding allowances for public officers. Provisions have been made in this financial year's budget for the payment of the increases in the allowances, and additional public service positions are being evaluated for implementation.

Mr. Speaker, two years ago, the government implemented a new structure for the secondary school teaching service, creating new positions at various levels. Many teachers have since received permanent appointments in these positions.

The government is also committed to the professional development of public and police officers. Over the past year, 567 officers received training in report writing, data analysis, information technology, communication, and events management. This investment in human capital underscores our commitment to excellence in governance.

## **BUILDING RESILIENCE**

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister declared at the United Nations in September 2017, shortly after the devastation caused by Hurricane Maria, that Dominica would rebuild as the world's first climate-resilient country.

Since then, we have made substantial progress, initially led by the Climate Resilience Execution Agency for Dominica (CREAD) from 2019 until its conclusion in December 2023. Currently, this effort has been transitioned to the Climate Resilience Execution Unit (CREU) which was established in February 2024 within the Ministry of Finance, Economic Development, Climate Resilience, and Social Security.

Out of necessity, we have invested in constructing hurricane-resistant homes and public buildings and procured advanced meteorological equipment and communication systems to ensure timely warnings to our citizens.

We are restoring and protecting our forests to mitigate climate change impacts and promoting sustainable agricultural practices to reduce import dependence and enhance food security.

This Government has also invested in various sectors such as tourism and renewable energy to decrease reliance on a single industry and diversify the economy. Financial and technical support to local businesses to foster a robust economic foundation continues.

Other key initiatives include developing a geothermal energy plant for sustainable and resilient energy; strengthening healthcare infrastructure;

and constructing and retrofitting disaster-resistant schools. These efforts are part of our broader strategy to build a climate-resilient nation, serving as an example for other countries facing similar challenges.

Mr. Speaker, in recent years, we have intensified efforts to educate the population on disaster preparedness and climate change adaptation, empowering local communities to participate in resilience-building activities and decision-making processes. We continue to promote sustainable land management and the protection of marine and terrestrial ecosystems to preserve Dominica's rich biodiversity and natural habitats.

Dominica has embraced technological advancements to enhance our resilience. Integrating information and communication technologies across sectors such as education, healthcare, and governance is improving efficiency and accessibility.

Mr. Speaker our journey towards resilience demonstrates the strength and determination of our people and underpins our growth agenda for this fiscal year, 2024-2025, and beyond. By integrating environmental sustainability, social development, technological innovation and economic diversification we are establishing a robust framework for a resilient future.

## **RESTORING AND PRESERVING THE ENVIRONMENT**

Mr. Speaker, we must all play our part in reducing carbon emissions to limit global warming. In Dominica we are actively taking action to do this, as part of our commitment to transition to 100% renewable energy by 2030. Our geothermal development efforts play a key role in that regard. We are also seeking to reduce the use of fossil fuels in the transportation industry. This year, we will focus on transitioning to low carbon transport through the phased implementation of a National E-Mobility Project, financed by the Green Climate Fund (GCF) which includes the establishment of 13 charging stations at strategic locations around the country, the introduction of electric vehicles for public transportation, providing concessionary financing to encourage the purchase of electric vehicles, among other initiatives.

Sadly though, minimal action has been taken by these developed and industrialized countries to mitigate this unsustainable situation. Although many have pledged financial support to small developing states like Dominica, which have been significantly impacted by destructive weather events, few have fulfilled these promises. We are grateful to those who have contributed, but the administrative processes to access these resources must be streamlined.

Mr. Speaker, Dominica has made significant progress in environmental restoration and preservation. Following Hurricane Maria, the government launched a forest and watershed restoration initiative, producing 350,000 plants by May 2024 and planting 300,000 trees in various parts of our country, including Loubiere, Jimmit, Sylvania, La Roche, Rosalie, Hampstead and Coulibistrie.

Several ecotourism sites and trails were also rehabilitated, and access to and management of national parks were enhanced with US\$3.5 million in financing from the Global Environment Fund (GEF). Other achievements include the implementation of the Green Climate Fund-Enhanced Direct Access (GCF-EDA) project to enhance climate adaptation and resilience, rehabilitate crucial infrastructure like drains and culverts, and integrate disaster risk management into the agricultural sector.

Our engagement with the Green Climate Fund will continue this year as the government seeks to increase Dominica's resilience to the impacts of climate change and reduce our carbon footprint. Focus will be placed on developing the capacities of ministries and agencies to implement their components of the Climate Resilience and Recovery Plan, enhancing the enabling environment to facilitate investments in low-carbon initiatives, and direct financial investments.

Government has also secured grant funding from the Green Climate Fund totaling EC\$172.8 million to support investments over the next three years.

EC\$108 million of this amount, will be used to develop an Integrated Coastal Zone Management Project. This project will, among other things, (i) to provide new coastal infrastructure, such as, seawalls, breakwater and other structures to protect Dominica's coastline; (ii) to help coastal communities' build their resilience to climate change; (iii) enhance the forest along the coast to protect inland and reduce flooding; and (iv) help subsidize parametric insurance for vulnerable residents along the coastline.

Our recent experience with coastal flooding during the passage of Hurricane Beryl highlighted the importance of implementing additional measures to increase our resilience to coastal flooding. Therefore Mr. Speaker, this is exciting news for residents who reside and traverse in low lying areas, and for Dominica.

The remaining EC\$64.8 million from the GCF will be used for a Dominica Community Resilience Enhancement Project (DOMCREP) for communities beyond the coastal zones. This project will secure adaptation interventions in agricultural practices in rural communities, build community shelters, and support the Met Office in its deployment of an early warning system.

Mr. Speaker, I have outlined major investments in housing, health, education, public services, the environment, and infrastructure projects. Projects such as the international airport, the Cabrits Marina, the Cable Car, the Enhancement of Roseau, the Cargo Port, the Cruise Village, the Geothermal Energy Plant and new Electricity Transmission System —along with new ventures in agriculture, value-added products, agro-processing, trade, and marketing, continue to pave the way for a dynamic, modern and resilient Dominica by 2030.

These efforts will create considerable business opportunities and numerous sustainable jobs, fostering prosperity among our citizens, including returning Dominicans. As a government, we are proud to be on track to achieve this significant transformation for Dominica.

## REVENUE MOBILIZATION

Mr. Speaker, the expenditure budget which I have just presented is to be financed from a combination of Government's revenue, loans and grants together totalling \$1,502.4 million and broken down as follows:

- Recurrent revenue in the amount of \$1,202.5 million
- Capital revenue of \$5.2 million
- Grants equivalent to \$112.4 million
- Loans at \$182.3

Of the \$1,202.5 million recurrent revenue which is projected, we expect to raise tax revenues of at least \$414.1 million, \$760.0 million through the CBI, and other recurrent revenues, such as fees and licences totaling \$28.4.

However, Mr. Speaker, these projections and more, can only materialize if we, as good citizens live up to our obligations and pay our taxes. This year, Government will strengthen the revenue collection systems to collect monies which are owed to the State. Too many businesses and people are owing income tax, value added tax, motor vehicle licences, company fees, hospital fees, and for land lots purchased from Government, among others.

Taxes, licences and fees are our contribution to the effective running of the State—including maintenance of our roads; ensuring we have medicines and supplies at our health facilities as well as nurses and doctors to provide services; securing the State and ensuring that our children receive an education. These are just some of the reasons why we must pay taxes—on time. If we do not pay our taxes we are denying the State the revenue it needs to better provide for our citizens.

Mr. Speaker, there are times you may hear Government has not paid this contractor or that service provider. However, it is really our nonpayment of our taxes which is often the main cause of this occurrence. To this end Mr.

Speaker, I take this opportunity to congratulate the many who continue to pay their taxes and licences, on time.

As a country, we have made significant progress without imposing additional taxes on citizens. Thanks to the inflows from the CBI Programme which we have use to offset some of the capital costs that otherwise would have had to be borne by residents, and the prudent and responsible management of the country by this Labour Party administration.

## **OTHER CRITICAL MATTERS**

### **Public-Private Sector Collaboration**

In further preparation for the transformation of our beautiful country and the tremendous opportunities we anticipate, Government will this year, increase collaboration with the private sector. We will establish a committee comprising individuals from the public and private sectors to examine economic and social issues and make policy recommendations which will create a more conducive environment for further investments. The committee's work will include input to address the issue of labour, including farm labour—as several jobs are available in Dominica but there is a scarcity of individuals to fill these jobs.

Furthermore, the committee will review the wages which are being paid in Dominica and make clear recommendations regarding the minimum wage rate.

Mr. Speaker, Government will also be undertaking a review of the corporate income tax and will seek feedback from this Committee. We are of the view that some amendments can be made, in particular, to attract additional large investments, increase the number of jobs opportunities as well as allow businesses to self-insure and protect their investments.

Another important issue which the Public-Private Sector Committee will look into is the price of goods in Dominica. Government has removed import duty, and in some instances VAT, on a number of basic items used extensively by Dominicans.

Flour, rice, milk, baby formula, sugar, adult and baby diapers, agricultural and fishing inputs, machinery and equipment, animal feed, among others, enter Dominica free of import duty and VAT.

Government is deeply concerned that notwithstanding the reduction in charges, the shelf prices of many of these items remain very high. For example, Government removed the 15 percent VAT and duty on adult and baby disposable diapers, however, citizens have not benefitted from Government's efforts to make these products cheaper.

Mr. Speaker, it is now time to have a conversation about this critical matter so that we could devise a plan of action to achieve the desired result—which is, a reduction in the price to consumers.

We must work to protect our vulnerable and their families, and provide the enabling conditions to reduce the cost of living.

### **Establishment of Tenancy and Rent Commission**

Mr. Speaker, many of our citizens live as renters or tenants and it is crucial that we provide more robust protections to safeguard them against exploitation and guarantee access to safe and affordable housing.

The Government of Dominica is concerned about the exorbitant prices and poor quality of some rental properties available to tenants.

At present, the Tenancies and Rent Control Act, Chap. 54:72, is in place, and establishes a tribunal to address rental disputes. However, to improve rental conditions, protections and rights of both landlords and tenants, the Government of Dominica will establish a Tenancy and Rent Commission to

address issues such as regulation of rent, protection against unjust eviction, and the enforcement of health and safety standards in rental properties.

The Commission's initial action will be to pursue amendments to the Tenancies and Rent Control Act, to improve regulations and clearly outline the rights and responsibilities of both landlords and tenants. Additionally, the Commission will provide oversight of rental agreements and conditions, field queries and refer to disputes to the Tenancy and Rent Control Tribunal.

## **CONCLUSION**

Mr. Speaker, development is a gradual process that requires certain sacrifices.

The Dominica Labour Party Government has consistently proven its ability to overcome every adversity it faces. We recognize global uncertainty, but we are undaunted by challenges. We have always punched above our weight and exceeded expectations; and despite the current difficulties in the world economy, this government will continue to make smart, calculated decisions to build the foundation for long-term prosperity—and this is exactly what we are doing in this year's budget.

We are making strategic investments to create sustainable jobs, enhance revenue potential, and provide improved services and a higher standard of living for our citizens.

We are building a Dominica that will prosper due to our unwavering commitment to each other and to our country. Today, as we embark on this bold new path, we have every reason to be optimistic, hopeful and confident. Let us become a more caring and industrious people, willing to work hard, to defend, and to promote the best of our country.

Mr. Speaker, we can only rely on ourselves to build a Dominica that stands tall, not only in the Caribbean but on the global stage.

This Government is playing its part, through progressive, people centred policies and programmes, to provide the foundation for social and economic growth and development. But the Government cannot do it alone. This is our country to build. To achieve success, we require the collective effort of all Dominicans, working hand in hand with your government, to achieve the shared prosperity to which we aspire.

I am confident that with God's continued grace and protection we can rise above every obstacle and secure a brighter future for succeeding generations.

Thank you, and may God bless the Commonwealth of Dominica.