



GOVERNMENT OF THE
COMMONWEALTH OF DOMINICA

FY 2025-2026

BUDGET

***“BALANCING RESILIENT DEVELOPMENT AND
FISCAL DISCIPLINE FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH”***



Presented By

Hon. Dr. Irving McIntyre

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

INTRODUCTION

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

I rise to deliver the Budget Address for the 2025/2026 Fiscal Year. I give thanks to Almighty God, for His continued blessings, mercies and protection over our people and nation, and His grace which has sustained us in the face of growing global economic and social challenges.

This National Budget is built on confidence, grounded in fiscal discipline, and driven by our shared vision for a Dynamic Dominica.

It is framed within the Government's guiding principle of "*Building a Resilient Nation*," as outlined in the National Resilience Development Strategy, Dominica 2030, and presented against a backdrop of sustained gains, made possible by a government which has remained steadfast in its commitment to responsible governance, inclusive growth and relentless service to our people. Investments in resilient infrastructure, healthcare, digital transformation, housing, education, tourism and agriculture are now delivering visible, meaningful results—fueling economic recovery, improving livelihoods and strengthening public and investor confidence.

It is within this context that this year's Budget has been developed under the theme:

"Balancing Resilient Development and Fiscal Discipline for Sustainable Growth".

Mr. Speaker, building on the work which this Government has already started, we remain firm in our mission to strengthen and expand the economy and national infrastructure; protect the environment; and ensure an efficient and transparent public service.

We are eternally grateful that in spite of the climatic and global policy uncertainties, the future is promising. This is not a time to retreat or slow down. It is a time to press forward, accelerate progress, and deepen reforms.

I will now give an overview of our achievements over the past year, present the Fiscal Year 2025–2026 budget estimates, and outline our plans for the year ahead.

MACRO-ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE AND OUTLOOK

Mr. Speaker, the swift escalation of trade tensions and extremely high levels of policy uncertainty are having a significant impact on global economic activity. According to the World Economic Outlook Report of April 2025, global growth is estimated at 2.8 percent in 2025, with projections of 3.0 percent for 2026.

Growth in advanced economies is projected to be 1.4 percent in 2025 and in emerging markets and developing economies, growth is expected to slow down to 3.7 percent in 2025 and 3.9 percent in 2026.

Regionally, economic activity in the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union expanded in 2024 by 3.6 percent and growth is expected to continue with projections of 3.2 percent and 3.4 percent for 2025 and 2026 respectively.

I am happy to report, Mr. Speaker, that in keeping with the regional trend, Dominica's Real GDP is estimated to have grown by 3.5 percent in 2024. This growth was fueled by robust wholesale and retail trade, a very ambitious public sector investment program, increase in tourism activity, and growth in agricultural output.

The rate of inflation also declined slightly averaging 3.1 percent in 2024 down from 3.5 percent in 2023, due to the easing of food and commodity prices. The current account deficit is estimated to have narrowed by 2 percentage points to 32.2 percent of GDP in 2024 but remains above its norm (16.3 percent of GDP) due to import-heavy infrastructure projects. Currently, our debt/GDP ratio hovers around 89 percent.

There was a slight decline in Government's fiscal position in Fiscal Year 2024/2025 moving from a primary surplus of 1.5 percent of GDP in the previous year, to a deficit of 0.6 percent. However, Fiscal year 2024/25 has had the strongest tax revenue performance on record as well as the highest tax arrears collection, a clear sign of the impact of increasing economic activity and improvements in tax administration. There was growth in tax revenue collection with all the major tax categories surpassing collections of the previous year. VAT has performed exceptionally well, exceeding budget estimates by 3 percent and surpassing collections for the previous year by \$9 million. The VAT now accounts for 41 percent of total tax revenues. Taxes on incomes and profits also had a strong performance, surpassing budget expectations as well as last year's collections.

Non-tax revenue, supported mainly by CBI inflows, grew by 3.1 percent over that of the previous year. The CBI continues to be a critical source of financing mainly for capital expenditure and accounts for roughly 58 percent of total revenues.

Overall outlays for recurrent expenditure have increased slightly by 1.3 percent. Expenditure on personal emoluments and transfers and subsidies registered increases whilst interest payments and spending on goods and services declined. It should be noted that total recurrent expenditure fell well within the budget estimate for the year.

There was a notable increase in capital expenditure for Fiscal Year 2024/2025, equivalent to 31 percent of GDP, reflecting the ongoing infrastructure development push as Government continues to invest heavily in economic infrastructure, resulting in a capital expenditure of \$603.5 million.

The Macro-Economic Outlook

Mr. Speaker, growth continues in 2025 with projections at a further 4.2 percent by the end of the calendar year, while inflation is projected to stabilize at around 2 percent, broadly aligned with U.S. price trends. The current account deficit is forecasted to narrow to its historical norm of 15 to 16 percent of GDP by 2027–2028.

The fiscal operations for budget year 2025/26 are projected to yield a primary surplus of 1.0 percent of GDP as strong revenue growth is expected to offset increases in both recurrent and capital expenditures. Further expansion in tax revenue will persist throughout the year with all major tax categories growing by an average of 4.5 percent. Improvements are also expected in non-tax revenue as CBI inflows remain elevated.

Expenditure growth for this fiscal year is fueled by a 9.6 percent increase in capital expenditure over the actual capital expenditure for last fiscal year. As a result, the capital expenditure is now equivalent to 32 percent of GDP. Recurrent expenditure is expected to grow by 7.6 percent over actual expenditure for last year (0.1 percent of last year's estimates), due to allocations for personal emoluments. The outlook for the 2026/27 and 2027/28 suggests further improvements in the fiscal balances as revenues continue to grow in line with projected economic expansion and total expenditures levels off.

Mr. Speaker, risks to the outlook remain active as ongoing geopolitical tensions could disrupt Dominica's tourism, trade, and external competitiveness. Extreme climate events could severely damage infrastructure and compromise growth. Furthermore, domestic risks, such as fiscal underperformance and lower-than-expected CBI inflows, could jeopardize the completion of key infrastructure projects, with knock-on effects to growth and debt.

On the other hand, better than expected dividends from construction of the international airport and the marina, commissioning of the new geothermal energy plant, or higher growth in advanced economies could pose upside risks to the outlook. Additionally, the implementation of the fiscal responsibility framework in 2026, the creation of a Debt Repayment Fund (DRF) and the establishment of the Vulnerability Risk and Resilience Fund (VRF) will help in maintaining a sound fiscal position.

As global policy changes continue and uncertainty reaches unprecedented levels, there is a pressing need for well-calibrated strategies that stimulate growth, maintain fiscal resilience, and foster long-term sustainable development. All these environmental factors were considered in crafting this year's Budget.

FISCAL YEAR 2025/2026 BUDGET PROPOSAL

Recurrent Expenditure

Mr. Speaker, I propose total recurrent expenditure of \$679.9 million for the Fiscal Year 2025/2026, a slight increase of only \$0.5 million over last year's recurrent expenditure estimates. This figure represents amounts provided by law including debt servicing and amounts required to operate the Government Service.

Mr. Speaker, despite the pressures of inflation, we have made the necessary expenditure adjustments, demonstrating this Government's continued commitment to prudent financial management. A closer review will show that the Government made deliberate, strategic decisions to direct funds where they are most needed and where they will deliver the greatest benefit to our people.

Mr. Speaker, Table 1 outlines the details of this proposed recurrent expenditure:

Table 1: Recurrent Expenditure by Ministry/Department

| Ministry/Department | Amount (000's m) | % |
|--|-----------------------------|---------------|
| Office of the President | 1.3 | 0.2% |
| Integrity in Public Office | 0.5 | 0.1% |
| Public and Police Service Commission | 0.5 | 0.1% |
| Legislature | 1.3 | 0.2% |
| Audit Department | 1.2 | 0.2% |
| National Security and Legal Affairs | 69.2 | 10.2% |
| Elections | 2.1 | 0.3% |
| Office of the Prime Minister | 10.3 | 1.5% |
| Finance, Economic Development, Climate Resilience and Social Security | 292.0 | 43.0% |
| Agriculture, Fisheries, Blue and Green Economy | 8.9 | 1.3% |
| Education, Human Resource Planning, Vocational Training and National Excellence | 71.2 | 10.5% |
| Housing and Urban Development | 6.1 | 0.9% |
| Health, Wellness and Social Services | 72.8 | 10.7% |
| Environment, Rural Modernisation, Kalinago Upliftment and Constituency Empowerment | 10.8 | 1.6% |
| Tourism | 23.8 | 3.5% |
| Culture, Youth, Sports and Community Development | 12.2 | 1.8% |
| Establishment, Personnel and Training Department | 9.9 | 1.4% |
| Public Works, Public Utilities and the Digital Economy | 57.4 | 8.4% |
| Foreign Affairs, International Business, Trade and Energy | 22.7 | 3.3% |
| Cabinet Office | 3.4 | 0.5% |
| Labour, Public Service Reform, Social Partnership, Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development | 2.3 | 0.3% |
| GRAND TOTAL | 679.9 | 100.0% |

The largest share of the recurrent estimates, 43 percent or \$292.0 million, is allocated to the Ministry of Finance, Economic Development, Climate Resilience and Social Security. Of this amount, \$128.0 million is allocated for debt service payments, demonstrating our unyielding commitment to meeting our financial obligations on time and in full.

A further \$47.3 million is appropriated for retirement benefits. Mr. Speaker, this Government continues to bear in mind those who have rendered all or most of their working life to the state—our dear retired public officers. To ensure their continued well-being, we have allocated sufficient funds to meet our obligations to them, on time. As promised, in 2023, we increased their pensions by 2 percent and have committed to adjusting these pensions, based on inflation, every three years.

In building fiscal resilience against natural disasters, \$8.4 million of the Ministry of Finance's allocation will go toward the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility (CCRIF) to cover Tropical Cyclone, Earthquake and Excess Rainfall premiums.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Health, Wellness and Social Services will receive the second largest allocation, amounting to \$72.8 million or 10.7 percent of the recurrent expenditure. We recognize that a healthy population is the cornerstone of a healthy economy, and our investments in the health sector reflect that understanding.

The Ministry of Education, Human Resource Planning, Vocational Training and National Excellence receives the third largest allocation at \$71.3 million or 10.5 percent of recurrent budget, underscoring our long-standing commitment to education as a critical driver of development.

Additionally, \$69.2 million, or 10.2 percent of recurrent expenditure, is earmarked for the Ministry of National Security and Legal Affairs in keeping with Government's commitment to maintain the safety and security of our people and country.

The Ministry of Public Works, Public Utilities and the Digital Economy will be allocated \$57.4 million, or 8.4 percent, of the total resource envelope, reflecting the importance we place on infrastructure and our growing digital transformation agenda.

Mr. Speaker, table 2 below provides a summary of the recurrent expenditure by economic classification.

Table 2: Recurrent Expenditure by Economic Classification (\$m)

| Classification | Estimate FY 2025/2026 | % | Estimates FY 2024/2025 | % | Forecast FY 2024/2025 | % |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|------|---------------------------|------|--------------------------|------|
| Personal Emoluments | 180.1 | 26% | 167.1 | 25% | 162.5 | 26% |
| Goods & Services | 232.6 | 34% | 234.9 | 35% | 222.5 | 35% |
| Transfers and Subsidies | 133.6 | 20% | 144.5 | 21% | 126.0 | 20% |
| Refunds | 5.0 | 0% | 5.0 | 1% | 4.7 | 1% |
| Investment Financing | 0.6 | 0% | 0.6 | 0% | - | 0% |
| Sub-Total | 551.9 | 81% | 552.1 | 81% | 515.7 | 82% |
| Interest | 49.7 | 7% | 54.1 | 8% | 37.3 | 6% |
| Debt Amortization & Sinking Fund | 78.3 | 12% | 73.2 | 11% | 74.4 | 12% |
| Total | 679.9 | 100% | 679.4 | 100% | 627.4 | 100% |

Mr. Speaker, goods and services account for \$232.7 million, or 34 percent of the total recurrent budget. Personal emoluments are estimated at \$180.1 million or 26 percent of the recurrent budget and include an amount of \$12.0 million allocated for proposed salary increases for fiscal years 2024/2025 and 2025/2026 as negotiations with public sector unions continue. Transfers and subsidies, including retirement benefits, public assistance, subventions for salaries of staff of statutory authorities, such as, the Dominica China Friendship Hospital, and contributions to regional and international organizations, total \$133.6 million or 20 percent of the recurrent expenditure. Interest payments are estimated at \$49.7 million, while debt amortization and contributions to the sinking fund are expected to total \$78.3 million.

Capital Expenditure

I now turn to the Capital Estimates for the 2025/2026 fiscal year. Mr. Speaker, I propose a total capital expenditure of \$661.7 million, representing a reduction of \$273.2 million compared to last year's estimates; however, this year's is \$58.2 million higher than the projected actual capital expenditure for Fiscal Year 2024/2025.

Table 3 provides a detailed breakdown of the Capital Expenditure by Ministry and Department.

Table 3: Capital Expenditure by Ministry/Department

| Ministry/Department | Amount (000's m) | % |
|--|---------------------|---------------|
| Office of the President | 0.8 | 0.1% |
| National Security and Legal Affairs | 2.8 | 0.4% |
| Elections | 3.8 | 0.6% |
| Office of the Prime Minister | 357.0 | 52.5% |
| Finance, Economic Development, Climate Resilience and Social Security | 14.2 | 2.1% |
| Agriculture, Fisheries, Blue and Green Economy | 23.4 | 3.4% |
| Education, Human Resource Planning, Vocational Training and National Excellence | 14.8 | 2.2% |
| Housing and Urban Development | 18.4 | 2.7% |
| Health, Wellness and Social Services | 10.0 | 1.5% |
| Environment, Rural Modernisation, Kalinago Upliftment and Constituency Empowerment | 42.9 | 6.3% |
| Tourism | 5.6 | 0.8% |
| Culture, Youth, Sports and Community Development | 15.7 | 2.3% |
| Establishment, Personnel and Training Department | 0.7 | 0.1% |
| Public Works, Public Utilities and the Digital Economy | 131.3 | 19.3% |
| Foreign Affairs, International Business, Trade and Energy | 16.8 | 2.5% |
| Labour, Public Service Reform, Social Partnership, Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development | 3.5 | 0.5% |
| GRAND TOTAL | 661.7 | 100.0% |

Our government continues to make strategic investments in transformative infrastructure projects, economic resilience, and excellent service delivery. These capital allocations are designed to support our national priorities, strengthen our productive capacity, and improve the quality of life of our people.

BUDGET PROPOSALS

Mr. Speaker, permit me to now present the details of the budget proposals for Fiscal Year 2025/2026.

Throughout the years, our government's plans have consistently placed our people at the forefront of national development, and the upcoming fiscal year is no exception. This reflects our firm belief that citizens must remain central to the nation's progress, and that no one should be marginalized or left behind.

Accordingly, the programmes and projects planned for the 2025–2026 fiscal year are designed to create employment, support business development and expansion, and grow a strong, diversified economy; thereby enhancing the quality of life, creating meaningful opportunities for prosperity, personal growth and social resilience for all citizens.

Mr. Speaker, as I outline our plans for the year ahead, I will also highlight key accomplishments from the past fiscal year that have laid the foundation for the progress we continue to seek to achieve.

AGRICULTURE AND THE BLUE ECONOMY

Mr. Speaker, over the past few years, more than EC\$130 million was invested to restore and develop agriculture and fisheries. These investments are in fulfillment of Government's commitment to increase agricultural production, enhance agro-processing output, improve Dominica's brand and expand our market share locally, regionally and internationally.

Crops sub-sector

Last fiscal year, in our thrust towards the economic advancement of the sector, strategic interventions were prioritized as it relates to the 5 Cs strategy (Coconut, Citrus, Coffee, Cocoa and Cannabis). In respect of **coconut** and **cocoa**, the Government ensured the distribution of planting material with in excess of 10,000 coconut plants distributed to 188 farmers and 17,000 cocoa plants to 85 farmers.

As it relates to **citrus**, Mr. Speaker, construction is nearing completion of the \$7.7 million modern citrus certification facility at Londonderry. This facility will enhance Dominica's capacity to produce certified, high-quality citrus planting material in line with international standards, thereby strengthening the resilience and competitiveness of the citrus industry. This facility has a capacity to produce up to 50,000 citrus plants and will support increased production, improved crop quality and expanded market access for farmers. It will also promote investment and innovation in the sector, ensure the availability of disease-free planting material, and contribute to long-term sustainability by building resilience against climate change and external shocks.

In tandem with this investment, the Government is continuing its efforts towards the propagation of disease-free citrus planting material which includes the grafting of 50,000 root stock. Distribution of these citrus plants will begin by September 2025, and it is expected that a 1000 acres of citrus will be established with the 50 000 plants.

I am also happy to report that the Agricultural Science and Tissue Culture Laboratory, built with a grant from the People's Republic of China, is fully staffed and operational. We will begin mass propagation of disease-free planting material for key crops such as banana, plantains, tannia, dasheen, sweet cassava, white potatoes, sweet potatoes, vanilla and pineapples.

Mr. Speaker, as we continue on our ambitious path to transform the agricultural sector, I am pleased to highlight the commencement of the Ninth Phase of the China-Aid Dominica Agricultural Technical Cooperation Project a significant milestone and another proud chapter in

the longstanding partnership between the Government of Dominica and the People's Republic of China.

The Ninth Phase brings with it the deployment of nine highly skilled technical experts, who will be stationed in Dominica for the next three years. These professionals bring expertise in crop production, agronomy, soil and plant science, greenhouse management, and agricultural innovation, and will work alongside our local teams to expand technical capacity, improve productivity, and promote sustainable farming practices.

Mr. Speaker, we are particularly excited about the arrival of an Aquaculture Expert, who will play a pivotal role in developing this emerging sub-sector. As part of our broader strategy to establish a sustainable and inclusive blue economy, we recognize the tremendous potential in freshwater fish farming to diversify livelihoods, increase protein self-sufficiency, and unlock new economic opportunities in both regional and domestic markets. Through this collaboration, we will not only introduce new techniques and infrastructure, but also lay the foundation for Dominica to become a regional player in aquaculture.

Mr. Speaker, the Ninth Phase is a tangible step forward in our national effort to create a climate-smart, innovation-driven agricultural sector that contributes meaningfully to national development and economic transformation.

Mr. Speaker, in the 2024 budget presentation, government highlighted its commitment 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. I am pleased to report that in March 2025, the Cabinet approved the establishment of the National Advisory Committee on Medicinal Cannabis to guide the strategic development of Dominica's cannabis industry.

This multidisciplinary body comprises a broad cross-section of stakeholders and experts, including internationally recognized cannabis researcher and Dominican national, Dr. Machel Emmanuel, whose appointment as Technical Advisor was announced during last year's budget address. In support of its mandate, the Committee established eight thematic subcommittees to address critical areas such as medical use, agriculture, legal frameworks, industry development, and the social and public health impacts of cannabis.

A major milestone was the successful hosting of the National Cannabis Symposium earlier this month, which brought together regional and international experts, academics, industry professionals and members of the Rastafari community. The symposium included the presentation of a Draft Cannabis Bill, which proposes the establishment of a dedicated Licensing Authority, eleven defined license categories, protections for traditional farmers, mandatory training for healthcare providers, a national patient registry and strict product tracking protocols. It also

includes provisions to strengthen regulatory oversight and ensure Dominica's compliance with international standards.

The Committee identified the need for legislative reform in areas such as regional trade and cannabis-related financial transactions, while also emphasizing the importance of expanding legal recognition of the religious and sacramental use of cannabis by the Rastafari community. Consultation with other stakeholders and the general public on the draft Bill, began earlier this week.

Mr. Speaker, the Government will explore the potential for value-added production within the cannabis industry and promote the development of locally manufactured products such as oils, teas, balms, creams and other wellness items. This focus aligns with our broader vision of creating sustainable economic opportunities while positioning Dominica to participate competitively in the emerging global cannabis market. There is no doubt that Dominica, because of its rainfall and quality of soil, possesses a huge advantage for the cultivation of high-quality cannabis.

As we move to finalise and present the Medicinal Cannabis Bill to Parliament in the coming months, we extend our sincere gratitude to all those involved in this complex and historic process, especially the Ministry of Agriculture for its leadership, and our regional partners for sharing invaluable insights from their experiences.

I want to assure the House of Nyabinghi that special provisions will be made in the revised legislation to capture their unique circumstance as a religious organization.

Supporting our Youth in the Productive Sectors

Mr. Speaker, greater attention is being given to our youth who, from all evidence, are playing a vital role in the agricultural sector.

During Fiscal Year 2024–2025, youth engagement and agricultural literacy continued under National Agriculture Education Program (NAEP). Through 4-H Club and school gardens, along with hands-on initiatives in vegetable production, hydroponics, fruit tree cultivation, and small livestock rearing, students gained exposure to sustainable farming practices and improved nutrition. Over 20 schools benefited from the national seedling distribution initiative and received technical training and mentoring support from Agriculture Extension Officers and interns of the National Employment Programme.

The reform of the National Association of Youth in Agriculture (NAYA) further advanced youth involvement, creating leadership opportunities and supporting agri-entrepreneurial efforts through training, advocacy, and regional exposure, including participation in key forums in Antigua and Costa Rica.

In parallel, significant strides were made in supporting young agro-processors. Throughout the year, training workshops, business coaching and technical assistance were provided in product

development, marketing, food safety and labelling compliance mainly through the Dominica Youth Business Trust. These young people gained visibility through national expos and pop-up markets, along with targeted mentorship and support. In addition, Government continues to provide direct grants, equipment, and advisory services to further bolster their businesses.

These investments are reshaping Dominica's agricultural landscape, strengthening agro-enterprises, empowering young people and laying the groundwork for resilient, inclusive, innovation-driven development, and their success.

This year, we will maximize productive land use by making available over 300 acres of land for agriculture. These lands are available at Blenheim, Felicite Hall in Wesley, Newfound Land, and Savanne York for leasing at a rate of \$1 per year, per acre, for the first five years, with a view to extending that period at a reasonable rate once the individual continues cultivate meaningfully on these lands. Mr. Speaker, this offer to our young farmers at a peppercorn rate is a major contribution to the reduction in the cost of their investment in agriculture because of the lease arrangement, which as you know Mr. Speaker, would be a major cost to them.

Our young people are expected to greatly benefit from this initiative.

Livestock sub-sector

Mr. Speaker, in the past year, investments in excess of \$8 million was made within the livestock subsector. The reconstruction of the national abattoir, a \$5.1 million facility in Layou Park is nearing completion thereby creating new opportunities for local meat producers.

Once completed by October this year, the facility will have the capacity to process up to 1,000 birds per hour and 50 pigs per day, dramatically improving the scale of local meat production.

To support the operation of the abattoir, investments totalling EC\$7.9 million are being made towards livestock restoration, including building materials, and financing to subsidize labour. To date, a total of 171 farmers have benefited from these investments aimed at building resilient infrastructure for the rearing of pig, poultry, rabbits and small ruminants. Furthermore, 120 small ruminant farmers have received fencing wire, and a total of 124 livestock structures are expected to be completed by August 2025.

Mr. Speaker, these investments in livestock form a critical part of the Government's broader strategic objectives to support local farmers to increase production, reduce the national food import bill, thus ensuring food security for the country.

In respect to the abattoir, Mr. Speaker, the government believes that there lies a huge opportunity for young professionals of varied academic and technical backgrounds to come together as a registered company and manage the operations of the abattoir. There will be no need for any capital investments as the abattoir will be fully equipped. All that would be required of these young

professionals, is to invest their knowledge, their talent and their passion, thus allowing them to generate income and build livelihoods.

Farm Access Roads

Mr. Speaker, beyond direct agricultural production, the Government has invested in critical infrastructure aimed at facilitating farm access. Contracts have recently been awarded for the rehabilitation of sections of the Neba Road in Layou Valley, Captain Bruce in Marigot and the Mero to Carholme Road at a total cost of \$762,544; while assessments have been done, and contracts will be awarded by August 15, 2025, for the rehabilitation of the Station Road at La Plaine, Dal Fondsie in Grand Coulibrie, and Carholme via Salisbury roads. Works on all these feeder roads will begin by September 2025.

In keeping with our commitment to rehabilitate farm and feeder roads each year, this fiscal year we are adding Buck/Bunnette Feeder Road in Portsmouth while another section of Mopo Road in Grand Bay will be repaired.

Fisheries and Blue Economy

Mr. Speaker, the Fisheries and Blue Economy subsectors are critically important in enhancing economic resilience, creating new investment opportunities, increasing food security, reducing the food import bill, and ultimately creating job opportunities for our people. As part of this Government's efforts to develop the Blue Economy, we have introduced proposed legislation to operationalize the Sperm Whale Reserve (SWR).

The Bill to enact the Sperm Whale Reserve Act received its first reading in Parliament in June. The Government has concluded further consultations with stakeholders and plans to return to Parliament no later than September 30, 2025, for the second and third reading of the Bill to facilitate its enactment into law.

Mr. Speaker, over the past year, Government has invested approximately \$5.2 million in strengthening the fisheries sector. This investment included the distribution of engines, restoration of boatbuilding sites, and the construction of 53 fiberglass boats, 20 of which have already been delivered to the beneficiaries. Additionally, capacity-building initiatives in boatbuilding are underway to enhance local skills and self-sufficiency.

Significant progress has also been made in the restoration of fish landing sites, with completion at Bioche, Dublanc, while Mahaut is nearing completion. Work on the Newtown, Fond Cole, Stowe, Scotts Head, and San Sauveur sites are expected to begin by August 2025. Furthermore, Government has assigned the management of the Roseau Fish Facility to DEXIA to create new opportunities in fish processing, logistics, and maintenance, while providing fisherfolk with fair market access and improved livelihoods.

These are direct investments in our fisherfolk, all in an effort to empower them so that they can meaningfully contribute to our food security and in so doing create wealth for themselves and their families. This is part of this government's strategic investments in our people.

Mr. Speaker, the initiatives outlined for the agriculture and the blue economy are focused on increasing overall production, enhancing the sector's contribution to the national GDP and creating new avenues for farmers to benefit from agro-processing and exports. By boosting output and investing in value-added production, these initiatives aim to modernize the sector, improve food security and open income-generating opportunities for farmers both locally and in export markets.

Incentive Package for the Agriculture Sector

Mr. Speaker, to support Governments' extensive investment in Agriculture and incentivize production by farmers, a ***rebate programme*** is proposed for select agricultural commodities. The rebate is meant to assure farmers that with a guaranteed investment, Government will provide additional support to expand their production. This is essentially a partnership between Government and farmers to enhance food security and help realise the goals of increased agricultural productivity.

The following will form the basis of the rebate programme:

1. Farmers investing in housing and infrastructure for poultry (min. 5000 broilers including stock and feed) will receive a rebate of 40% of cost up to a maximum of \$20,000.
2. For investments in Protected Agriculture
 - a. fully enclosed, including hydroponics- 50% of cost up to \$20,000
 - b. partially enclosed - 50% of cost up to \$9,000
3. The following investments, establishment and rehabilitation in specific commodities will benefit from the following rebates:
 - a. Citrus establishment per acre – 50% of cost up to \$2,000
 - b. Cocoa establishment per acre – 50% of cost up to \$2,200
 - c. Cocoa rehabilitation per acre – 50% of cost up to \$1,500
 - d. Coffee establishment per acre – 50% of cost up to \$2,200
 - e. Coffee rehabilitation per acre – 50% of cost up to \$1,500

Additionally, considering the current vulnerability of our agricultural sector to natural disasters, a ***crop insurance scheme*** will be implemented to protect farmers from catastrophic loss. The scheme will prioritise vulnerable commodities such as plantains, bananas and other high-risk crops in the first instance. This initiative would include joint contributions by farmers and the Government.

Mr. Speaker, these interventions will further strengthen our food systems and move us closer to our goal of Agriculture's EC\$700 million contribution to GDP by 2030.

AGRO-PROCESSING

Mr. Speaker, I wish to focus now on agro processing, a critical avenue for employment, particularly in rural communities.

Presently, support for agro processing is being channeled through five Government entities, namely, the Small Business Unit, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Dominica Youth Business Trust, the AID Bank and DEXIA.

Government continues to play a key role in advancing agro-processing by building the capacity of entrepreneurs through technical support to establish and manage their businesses. This support includes the provision of tax concessions, access to financing for start-up and expansion and the procurement or supply of essential equipment. Efforts have also focused on promoting price stability, enhancing investor confidence, and facilitating the marketing, purchase, and sale of agro-processed products, both locally and in international markets.

Mr. Speaker, each year, we witness the emergence of new and improved local products which reflect the creativity, innovation, ambition and entrepreneurial spirit of our agro-processors. From Bee Natural's skincare line, Nelly's Plantains Chips, Draw Teas, Aqua Botanical's sea moss products, Natures Touch oils and balms, Eclat Nova Luxuries soaps and candles and Mama Cheveux's hair products, to the growing range of locally produced pepper sauces, juices, pastries, cocoa sticks and other natural products, Dominica's agro-processing sector continues to evolve and expand.

We are also seeing tangible progress in the development of key value-added products. Passion fruit pulp is increasingly supporting local juice production and export, while pepper mash is being developed to meet the needs of both local processors and new export markets.

To further strengthen agro-processing, we will provide targeted support to plantain chip producers and processors of other plantain by-products. This includes exploring market expansion opportunities and implementing a robust service delivery framework to help scale production and meet growing consumer demand. These efforts are part of our broader strategy to strengthen agro processing, increase exports and create sustainable income opportunities across the value chain.

Government will also, through the Dominica Youth Business Trust (DYBT), provide equipment and packaging support to 138 micro, small and medium enterprises during this Fiscal Year, at a cost of \$3.2 million. Additionally, work will continue on the establishment of a National Multi-Purpose Agro-Processing Facility, alongside the identification and leasing of spaces across the country to create entrepreneurship hubs. These hubs will support agro-processors and other small manufacturers in scaling up production, improving product quality and accessing new markets.

I wish to remind all present and potential agro-processors, that Government has in place a very generous and efficient concession regime accessible through the Small Business Unit.

TRADE

The progress we have made in agriculture and fisheries has been supported by sustained investments in programmes and projects designed to boost trade, business and investment. These efforts are central to our goal of building a transformed, diversified economy.

Through strategic diplomacy, meaningful dialogue and targeted partnerships across key sectors, this Government has laid a solid foundation for sustainable development, protecting our national interests while unlocking new opportunities for growth. We have continued to pursue the reduction of trade barriers, the expansion of export markets, and the attraction of foreign direct investment, all aimed at strengthening Dominica's economic resilience.

During the last Fiscal Year, Government provided \$3.6 million to the DEXIA Revolving Fund. Of this amount, DEXIA made 2,466 purchases from 587 farmers at a total cost \$1.9 million. DEXIA will continue to use this facility to meet its commitments to farmers, on time, and provide credit arrangements to hucksters, all to foster increased production and exports.

Key exports included 3.8 million pounds of plantains, dasheen, and ginger, with regular shipments to the British Virgin Island, the USVI, Antigua, Guadeloupe, and St. Kitts. Three successful shipments of plantains totaling 61,500 lbs were also sent to Miami, advancing efforts to penetrate the U.S. market.

For fiscal year 2025/26, DEXIA will continue to forge ahead to increase our market share in Tortola and St. Thomas, while pursuing opportunities in the U.S. and U.K., particularly for dasheen, plantains and ginger.

Additionally, DEXIA will enhance operations at the Roseau Fish Market Facility with the overall objectives of increasing local market penetration, improving product quality and marketing, and advancing export readiness via EU and U.S. certification.

MICRO SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZE ENTERPRISE

Mr. Speaker, our Government remains deeply appreciative of the critical role that micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) play in national development. As engines of job creation, innovation and local investment, and growth, they are central to building a resilient and diverse economy.

In Fiscal Year 2024/25, through the Small Business Support Unit (SBSU), Government provided targeted support to strengthen MSMEs. These included training of 157 entrepreneurs in financial management, customer service, marketing, and digital literacy, and international exposure for 67 entrepreneurs through exchanges in China and Venezuela. As of June 30, 2025, 549 MSMEs received a total of \$25.8 million in low-interest loans from the AID Bank, supporting expansion,

equipment purchases and job creation. Fiscal incentive licenses were also granted in key sectors, such as agro-processing, videography and construction, enabling duty-free imports of essential business inputs.

For the 2025/26 fiscal year, the Government will intensify efforts to support MSMEs through improve financing, policy reform, digitization and strategic partnerships.

During pre-budget consultations, the MSMEs indicated that they appreciate the financial support received from the Government but would need even greater support in the area of client and staff development. To this end, the Government has allocated funds for the development of a Small Business Institute Curriculum in collaboration with the Dominica State College to offer training in marketing, entrepreneurship, digital transformation and customer service, which would lead to formal certification in business management.

Grant and concessional financing will continue, particularly for start-ups and expanding businesses.

Furthermore, as a means of further increasing support to our MSMEs Government will host an Expo showcasing Dominica's products to major players in the regional market. This will enhance market access, visibility, and investment opportunities for our businesses.

TOURISM

Mr. Speaker, Dominica stands proudly at the forefront of the global movement toward sustainable tourism. As the "Nature Island," our approach is rooted in preserving the island's pristine rainforests, vibrant coral reefs, volcanic peaks and unique cultural heritage, while offering visitors authentic, meaningful experiences that honour our people and our environment.

Tourism, Mr. Speaker is one of the main driving forces of our economy, contributing significantly to employment, foreign exchange earnings and community development. It is a sector with immense potential to transform lives and stimulate growth across multiple industries, such as hospitality, transportation, agriculture, culture and the creative arts. As such, Government continues to place strategic focus on strengthening and expanding of Dominica's tourism offerings.

Our focused investments are yielding positive results. In fiscal year 2024/25, visitor arrivals increased by 9.9 percent over the 2023/2024 period and 66.4 percent over the pre pandemic levels. Stay-overs visitors exceeded pre-pandemic levels by 35.1 percent and cruise arrivals almost doubled with an 83 percent increase. Every aspect of the tourism sector exceeded expectations. Noteworthy is a 35 percent increase in visitor arrivals for Mas Dominique 2025 and a 9 percent increase for the 2024 World Creole Music Festival. Hotel occupancy rates doubled during 2024-2025, reflecting the growing appeal for destination Dominica.

Mr. Speaker, for years, limited connectivity limited our growth, but under the leadership of this Dominica Labour Party Government, we have delivered real, measurable progress in this critical area, progress that had been promised by past administrations but realized only under our leadership.

Upgrades to the Douglas Charles Airport, including the installation of runway lighting, extension, and grooving have significantly enhanced the airport's capacity and reliability. Coupled with direct negotiations with major carriers, these improvements have led to increased visitor arrivals into Dominica, especially from key North American markets.

In addition, Caribbean Airlines will commence service to Dominica from San Juan beginning next month, further strengthening our regional and international links.

We continue to implement our aggressive route development strategy to secure airline commitments ahead of the commissioning international airport. In addition to the direct flights from major carriers such as American Airlines and United Airlines, we are pursuing direct flights from Toronto, Atlanta and St. Thomas; while, discussions with other regional and international airlines, including British Airways, Virgin Atlantic and Condor, are ongoing and promising. These actions are not only increasing arrivals in the short term but also proactively positions Dominica to benefit from increased airlift as soon as the new airport becomes operational.

A Vision for Sustainable Growth in Tourism

Mr. Speaker, despite these impressive gains, we recognise the need to intensify our efforts to further enhance Dominica's standing as a global model for sustainable tourism based on environmental stewardship, cultural authenticity and community empowerment.

Dominica possesses a unique blend of cultural, ecological and agricultural assets that set us apart in the region- our rich tapestry of cultures, including our Creole, Kalinago, Maroon and Rastafarian heritage; our deep-rooted agricultural traditions; our wellness practices grounded in nature; and our unspoiled marine and rainforest ecosystems.

Therefore, we are reimagining our tourism model to better capitalise on these natural and cultural assets. Our renewed approach will:

- drive inclusive national growth by strengthening linkages between tourism and key sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, culture, wellness and small business development.
- preserve and celebrate Dominica's rich natural and cultural heritage, ensuring that all development aligns with our identity as the "Nature Island of the Caribbean."
- focus on promoting high-value, low-impact tourism, prioritizing quality over quantity, while maintaining ecological balance and
- empower communities through training, micro-financing and the promotion of local stories and traditions.

Mr. Speaker, this focus on authenticity and sustainability extends beyond our landscapes and communities into our oceans.

Dominica has demonstrated its long-term commitment to marine conservation with the recent designation of the world's first and only Sperm Whale Sanctuary. This 200-square-mile marine protected area positions us to generate significant revenue, while serving as a branding asset for the country.

The Reserve will serve as a powerful symbol of Dominica's commitment to responsible tourism and further distinguish our brand as a leader in eco-conscious travel and environmental stewardship.

Accommodation Policy Framework

Mr. Speaker, demand for destination Dominica is expanding at a rapid pace. As a result, finding high-standard accommodation, particularly during peak seasons, is becoming a challenge. During this Fiscal year, we anticipate that Tranquilly Beach Resort in Salisbury, Ocean Edge in Castle Comfort and Sanctuary Rainforest Resort in the Roseau Valley will commence operations, while Anichi Resort in Picard is expected to become operational by October 2026.

We remain steadfast in our support for the hotel sector, which continues to serve as the backbone of our tourism industry, through targeted incentives, professional training, marketing partnerships and efforts to improve airlift capacity.

At the same time, we recognize the emergence of a growing niche: authentic, sustainable, design-conscious accommodations that offer more intimate and immersive experiences. From eco-luxury villas and forest lodges to boutique homestays, these properties elevate the visitor experience while reflecting the unique character of the communities in which they are rooted.

The Government is advancing a bold new initiative aimed at expanding high-quality, sustainable accommodation options across the island. Our vision is simple yet transformative: to foster at least one exceptional, locally owned property in every village, serving both short-term and long-stay travelers, and remote workers.

'Village Stays' is a reimagined model of accommodation that blends international standards with the warmth, culture and natural beauty that make Dominica unique. This will be an immersive cultural experience that invite guests to connect deeply with our people, heritage and environment.

To realize this vision, the Government is rolling out a dedicated ***Village Stays Policy Framework***. This will include:

- Training in sustainable construction and culturally appropriate design
- Operational mentorship to ensure consistency and excellence
- Monitoring and certification for quality assurance

A cross-sector ***Oversight Committee*** will be tasked to guide the implementation.

Dominica is also leveraging partnerships with global platforms like Airbnb to enhance visibility and market access, ensuring that community-based accommodations are positioned to thrive.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, residents, particularly property owners along the Waitukubuli National Trail, are being encouraged to develop bed and breakfast accommodations to enhance the trail experience. For these property owners, Government is willing to partner with you by providing the necessary concessions and fiscal incentives.

Additionally, Government will provide targeted fiscal incentives packages to small tourism accommodation across the country, to support the growth and quality of these facilities. These packages will allow duty-free concessions on essential items such as linens, cutlery, cookware, small appliances and other furnishings necessary to meet hospitality standards. By reducing the upfront costs of outfitting and upgrading these properties, we aim to encourage higher levels of participation, improve the guest experience, and ensure that locally owned tourism accommodations are prepared for the sharp increase in stayover visitors arrivals which are projected when the international airport, now under construction, becomes operational. Applications for these concessions should be made through the Ministry of Tourism.

This community-driven approach to the sector will also be supported with the launch of a ***Community Tourism Accelerator***, providing:

- Technical training in experience design
- Micro-grants and access to small business funding
- Storytelling and content development support
- Market access through national and global platforms

Mr. Speaker, we understand that policy must be followed by action. That is why, in this fiscal year, we will move from planning to implementation:

- The Tourism Implementation Strategy, complete with timelines, budgets, and key performance indicators, will be finalized;
- We will also launch a Pilot Community Accommodation Programme in 3-5 high-potential villages to deepen community participation and
- A Tourism Awareness Campaign will be introduced to engage citizens and the diaspora.

To ensure that these initiatives are effectively executed, we will strengthen the overall governance and institutional framework for tourism by:

- Establishing a National Tourism Council to coordinate cross-sectoral action;
- Reinforcing the capacity of the Discover Dominica Authority and the Ministry of Tourism;
- Holding regular consultations with stakeholders; and
- Implementing a monitoring and evaluation framework to track progress.

It would be remiss of me not to remind our citizens of the nationwide ‘Keep Dominica Clean and Green’ campaign, launched last year. This initiative calls on every citizen, resident and visitor to take responsibility for the cleanliness and beauty of our island. Each of us has a role to play, as we are all stakeholders in, and beneficiaries of, a cleaner environment.

Mr. Speaker, through these thoughtful initiatives, we aim to triple tourism’s contribution to Gross Domestic Product, ensuring that more Dominicans can participate in and benefit from this vibrant industry.

ENERGY

Mr. Speaker, this Government has no doubt demonstrated its commitment to the development of sustainable energy sources and is working to ensure that 100 percent of the island’s electricity is generated from domestic renewable energy sources by 2030.

Dominica’s push towards 100 percent renewable energy is driven by the need to reduce electricity costs, stabilize prices while making our country more attractive for doing business by way of reduced energy costs.

In my previous budget address, I outlined major agreements which were in place for developing the geothermal power plant and the electricity transmission network. Today, I provide an update on the implementation of both projects.

Roseau Valley Geothermal Power Plant

Mr. Speaker, with regards to the Roseau Valley 10 megawatt geothermal power plant, I am pleased to confirm that construction of the power plant is on schedule. The turbines, generators, pipelines to the geothermal wells and cooling system are on site and installation works are progressing. Testing of the various components of the power plant will commence in October of this year, with commissioning planned for the end of December 2025.

Public education efforts, ranging from community to school consultations and private sector tours, are also building national awareness as we plan future geothermal expansion and commercial use.

Transmission Network

To support this shift to 100% renewable energy and enhance efficiency we are upgrading our transmission network at a cost of \$116.1 million, starting with a resilient, Hurricane Category 5-rated system connecting the Roseau Valley to Fond Cole. This includes three new substations and 18 km of underground and overhead lines, funded through a World Bank loan and Global Environment Facility grant. Work has begun on the Padu, Trafalgar and Fond Cole substations, with key components to become operational by late 2025.

Additionally, a \$7 million 5-megawatt Battery Energy Storage System, funded by the Governments of Dominica and the United Arab Emirates, was commissioned in May 2025 at DOMLEC's generation site in Fond Cole. This has brought two major benefits to DOMLEC and its consumers. Firstly, it has reduced the cost of generation as DOMLEC is now able to store power and shut down generators which originally would have been in operation to back up other generators. Secondly, it has significantly increased the reliability of DOMLEC's service as the Company is now able to keep five megawatts of power, twice the size of the Company's largest generator, on standby, to be utilized in the event of loss of generation.

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Speaker implementing infrastructural projects is not only to satisfy sector objectives but to pursue broader national development targets of sustainable growth and resilient development. In our country infrastructure development is a very costly venture largely due to our topography, our many rivers, waterways and ravines, and regular rainfall, among other factors. This Government is guided and guarded by these realities and tries to ensure that the projects are undertaken in a coordinated manner, ensuring cost minimization and overall efficiency. Furthermore, we aim to ensure job creation and maximum direct benefits to our businesses and citizens.

At present, our most significant infrastructure investments are concentrated in the areas of ports and roads. These substantial initiatives are generating higher revenues, more sustainable jobs for our people and an improved standard of living for everyone, which in the end will foster higher growth and the economic independence of our people and country.

International Airport

Mr. Speaker, since the mobilization and commencement of construction of Dominica's international airport, we have made substantial progress in transforming this long-awaited national priority into a reality. The scale and pace of work on this project are unprecedented in our nation's history, and the airport is now over 40% complete and ahead of schedule.

Mr. Speaker, civil works are well advanced. Major supporting infrastructure, such as, four large culverts, spanning more than 2,000 meters in length, have been constructed to ensure proper drainage. It is anticipated that the leveling of the runway will be complete by the end of December this year.

We have started construction of the Passenger Terminal and will soon commence work on the Cargo Facility, Air Traffic Control Tower and Rescue and Firefighting Services Building. We will also commence construction of a tunnel beneath the runway to ensure uninterrupted, safe and efficient access between the communities of Wesley and Woodford Hill.

To date, over \$45 million in compensation has been paid out to 235 property owners, and 47 new homes have been constructed, with 31 built directly by the Government.

Mr. Speaker, this transformative project remains on schedule. It will serve as a catalyst for tourism, trade and investment, reshaping Dominica's economic landscape and global connectivity.

The Marina

I am happy to report to the Honourable House that the construction of the Cabrits Marina is progressing on schedule. The marina remains a key pillar in the Government's strategic plan to position Dominica as a premier destination for marine tourism.

Phase 1 of the project, which is currently underway, involves critical foundational infrastructure, including the marina basin, revetment and breakwater. This phase is scheduled for completion by June 2026 and is being executed with precision and adherence to international engineering standards.

Phase 2 of the marina development, for which procurement activities will commence in August 2025, followed by construction by January 2026, will deliver the core operational features of the marina. These include the installation of fixed jetties, floating pontoons and the provision of marina services such as docking, fueling, waste disposal and security. This phase is projected to be completed by August 2026.

Phase 3 will address all remaining utilities and supporting infrastructure, ensuring that the marina is fully equipped to handle the needs of visiting vessels and their crews. This final phase is expected to be completed by November 2026.

Mr. Speaker, I must inform the Honourable House that the Government of Dominica has identified a reputable and experienced marina operator. This operator has received global recognition under The Yacht Harbour Association's (TYHA) Gold Anchor Accreditation Scheme, a standard that reflects a commitment to excellence in marina development and customer service.

The benefits of this partnership extend well beyond the physical infrastructure. It brings with it the training and employment of a local workforce, ensuring that Dominicans are equipped to take full advantage of the opportunities within the marine tourism sector. It will also foster strong engagement with both community and private sector stakeholders, creating a shared sense of ownership and participation in the success of the marina.

Through the operator's global reputation for excellence, the Cabrits Marina will offer best-in-class services and standards, attracting a loyal following of captains, crew and boaters who already associate the brand with quality and professionalism. Moreover, the marina will enjoy worldwide exposure and promotion through the operator's international marketing network, with targeted destination marketing initiatives carried out in close collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism and Discover Dominica Authority.

Importantly, the partnership also includes a robust plan for ongoing facilities management and asset preservation, ensuring that the marina remains sustainable, profitable and in good condition for years to come.

Mr. Speaker, once operational, the Cabrits Marina will unlock wide-reaching opportunities in our yachting and maritime tourism sectors, generate direct and indirect jobs, stimulate surrounding businesses and enhance Dominica's presence on the global nautical map.

This project is an investment in a new economic frontier for Dominica and the Government is committed to its successful completion.

In preparation for the opportunities which will arise, the Government will move to provide scholarships to train at least five individuals to become certified captains and pilots.

Other Ports

Preparatory work has commenced on the **Anse de Mai Jetty**. Some of the decking is being done precast off site and the tubular piles have been ordered. This Project is expected to be completed by end of this Fiscal Year.

With the anticipated rise in traffic following the completion of the Anse de Mai jetty, construction will begin on a new **Customs Building** at that location. This building will house customs and immigration offices, as well as accommodation for the officers stationed there, ensuring a secure, efficient and comfortable environment for port operations.

Once completed, the new port facility will increase the profitable trade between Dominica and the French islands of Guadeloupe, the Saints and Marie Galante.

Simultaneously, detailed designs are being finalized for a **new ferry terminal** at the existing Bayfront site in Roseau. Mr. Speaker, with passenger arrivals often reaching 300 to 400 people per ferry, the current terminal is no longer adequate.

Stakeholder feedback confirmed that the Bayfront remains the preferred location for passengers, and the new terminal will reflect this preference while addressing the urgent need for improved functionality. The redesigned facility will include clearly defined areas for arrivals and departures on the ground floor to reduce congestion and speed up processing. The upper level will house a modern departure lounge, complete with duty-free shop, viewing platform, restaurant and other traveller amenities. We anticipate that a contract will be awarded by December 31, 2025, with construction set to begin in the third quarter of the Fiscal Year.

Mr. Speaker, these extensive investments in our port infrastructure are more than physical upgrades, they are part of our broader strategy to welcome the world to Dominica, unlock the full value of our Nature Island brand, and do so sustainably. By modernizing our ports, we are

positioning Dominica to increase trade, boost agricultural and tourism revenues, generate sustainable jobs, raise per capita income, and build a stronger, more resilient economy for all.

Roads

Mr. Speaker, this Government has relentlessly pursued its ambition to provide Dominica with safe, durable and climate-resilient roads. Today, major road projects are underway in every region of the country, reflecting the scale and ambition of our infrastructure agenda. The largest of these is the East Coast Road Project, from Bois Diable to Hatton Garden via Castle Bruce and the Kalinago Territory, valued at a whopping \$227.8 million. Works are targeted to end in October 2025 with the completion of the Pagua Bridge.

The upgraded road network will facilitate better access to markets, healthcare, and education for residents of the eastern communities. Additionally, it will boost tourism by providing improved and safer routes to natural attractions and cultural sites including the Emerald Pool and the Kalinago Territory, thereby contributing to the overall economic development of these communities and Dominica by extension.

Mr. Speaker as one major road is at the point of completion in the East, another has started in the South of the country.

The Loubiere to Grand Bay Road started in February of this year with grant funding of \$117.0 million from the Government of the United Kingdom. The primary focus of this Project is road widening, improved drainage, and construction of five bridges. It is anticipated that Government will be required to provide counterpart financing for additional works required along that route which are presently not included in the scope of works.

Initial preparations are also underway for the complete rehabilitation of the road from Portsmouth to Hatton Garden to be funded by the Government of the People's Republic of China. This road project will be done in three phases- phase one will be from Portsmouth to Anse de Mai; phase 2 from Anse de Mai to Wesley; and phase 3, from Wesley to Hatton Garden.

This major road improvement project will include the replacement of all 39 bridges from single-lane to double-lane, the construction of new culverts, slope stabilization and major road realignment which will eliminate unnecessary bends and corners, enhancing road safety and reducing travelling time.

It is anticipated that the road construction will commence in late 2026.

Government is investing over \$4.9 million in critical road edge failures and drainage rehabilitation projects across the island to improve road safety. These works include the construction and reinforcement of retaining walls in Belles, Bioche, Penrice, Roger and St. Joseph to stabilize slopes and prevent erosion along these major roadways.

Additionally, drainage upgrades are underway through the rehabilitation and replacement of box culverts in St. Joseph, and Salisbury. These projects feature reinforced concrete structures, spillways, catchpits, wing walls and safety guardrails to enhance the durability of the road network and reduce vulnerability to extreme weather events.

Collectively, Mr. Speaker, these infrastructure works will ensure safer, more reliable transportation routes for residents and visitors alike.

DIGITAL ECONOMY

Mr. Speaker the Government has expressed a clear vision to build the Digital Economy through digital transformation across the public and private Sector to increase resilience, inclusion and innovation.

The strategic pillars of Digital Transformation include building digital skills and literacy, fostering innovation, delivering efficient public services, building resilient digital infrastructure, and ensuring that the modern legal systems are in place. The Government has been implementing several key activities aimed at achieving these strategic pillars.

Mr. Speaker, embracing innovation will lead to new business opportunities, increased productivity, and greater efficiency for the business sector. Last Fiscal Year, the Government of Dominica awarded digital innovation matching grants to 79 small businesses to support innovation in the sector; and began outfitting the computer labs at our primary and secondary schools. I am happy to report, that these businesses have since digitalized their manual processes.

Furthermore, as part of a drive to enhance efficiency and accessibility to the public service, Government has in place an eServices web and mobile portal providing citizens with a one-stop shop for information, applications, and payments for a full range of government services. Since the launch of these services, over 13,000 transactions have been processed using the eServices and ePayment portals. The eServices platform will be expanded in this Fiscal Year to include new services such as application and payment for all types of visas to facilitate travel to Dominica.

Additionally, in the new fiscal year, Government will expand the digitalization of services to include the launching of a new integrated health system and the start of implementation of a new tax system both of which are expected to improve services to the public.

In addition, upgrades will be made in support of the tourism sector including digital solutions for payment and access to tourism site. In this regard, Government, in collaboration with the National Bank, will launch a programme for small operators, including vendors and taxi drivers in the tourism sector to gain access to mobile card processing machines at affordable rates. This will

make their services more accessible and convenient for our visitors and residents and increase business for the operators.

Establishment of A Digital Fabrication Laboratory (Fab Lab)

Mr. Speaker,

In line with our vision to build a knowledge-based economy and prepare our young people for the industries of the future, Government will establish a Digital Fabrication Laboratory (Fab Lab) at the Dominica State College. This initiative represents a critical investment in the next generation of Dominican innovators, engineers and entrepreneurs.

The Fab Lab will serve as a dynamic *Maker's Space*, a collaborative, high-tech environment where students, artists and creators can experiment with cutting-edge digital tools and fabrication technologies. This facility will offer hands-on training in 3D modeling, 3D printing, coding, electronics and microcontroller programming, using tools such as Arduino, Blender and Plasticity.

Through this facility, students will be empowered to translate digital designs into tangible prototypes, developing skills in rapid prototyping, product development, interactive electronics and creative problem-solving. They will gain practical experience integrating sensors, LEDs, servos and circuit boards to create functional, real-world applications.

Importantly, Mr. Speaker, the Fab Lab will not be limited to full-time college students. It will also offer short courses and weekend workshops, encouraging informal learning and exploration.

Mr. Speaker, with the establishment of the Fab Lab we will nurture creativity, critical thinking and entrepreneurship; ultimately inspiring a new generation of Dominican innovators and fostering long-term interest in technology and engineering fields.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Speaker, the Environment is the common thread which connects all sectors that drive our economic and social development. It must be responsibly managed and safeguarded for the benefit of both present and future generations.

During the 2024–2025 fiscal year, a range of initiatives were implemented to strengthen environmental sustainability in support of national development, while advancing Dominica's goals of climate resilience and sustainable growth.

Guided by the National Resilience Development Strategy (NDRS) and aligned with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), our agenda for the environment focuses on carbon neutrality, forest conservation and climate resilience. This year, we are also placing increased emphasis on improving waste management.

Carbon Neutrality

In 2016, Dominica ratified the Paris Agreement with a view to limiting global warming and mitigating the effects of climate change. This is an ambitious carbon emission reduction target, and I am pleased to report that Dominica has been declared carbon neutral by REDD+ under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, meaning the country has a net-zero carbon footprint. This positions Dominica among only eight nations globally-and the only small island developing state, alongside larger rainforest nations like Guyana and Suriname.

REDD+ certification, Mr. Speaker, refers to the process of verifying and certifying emission reductions and removals from forest conservation and restoration activities.

This accomplishment aligns with international climate goals, including the Paris Agreement target of net-zero emissions by 2050. Dominica's leadership in sustainability demonstrates that environmental stewardship is a matter of commitment and vision, not size.

Forest Conservation

Mr. Speaker, in keeping with our focus on forest conservation, the Government advanced a comprehensive portfolio of programmes and projects during the review period, under the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP), with support from regional and international development partners.

Foremost among these is the Post-Hurricane Maria Reforestation Programme, aimed at restoring Dominica's forest ecosystems, increasing biodiversity, and revitalizing local livelihoods. This programme, supported by the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and the Partnership Initiative for Sustainable Land Management (PISLM), continues to expand reforestation efforts across the island, with active propagation at nurseries in Pont Casse, Grandbay, Soufriere, Belles, Melville Hall and Delices. Thousands of forest, fruit and ornamental plants were distributed to farmers, schools and communities to promote environmental restoration and beautification.

Government also undertook critical works under the 'Rehabilitation of Trails and Facilities at Ecotourism Sites' project. Infrastructure upgrades were completed at high-traffic visitor sites including Emerald Pool, Trafalgar Falls and the Boiling Lake trail. Improvements included safety railings, new signage and trail resurfacing. Through the support of the World Bank GEF7 Project, new tools and equipment were procured to support maintenance and climate resilience of these sites. Contracts have also been signed for rehabilitation works on Segments 4 and 11 of the Waitukubuli National Trail.

As a result of these investments, revenue generated from ecotourism site user fees has risen significantly, with net earnings reaching over EC\$1.44 million as of May 2025.

Mr. Speaker, under the SOILCARE II Project, Dominica is playing a leading role in promoting sustainable land management across the region. This EC\$6.75 million initiative, funded by the

Global Environment Facility (GEF) will upgrade our national soil laboratory to Tier 2 standards, digitize soil maps, and carry out a national soil survey that includes carbon analysis.

The project also features a regional component focused on Indigenous Peoples, as well as scholarships and training to build local expertise in soil science, Geographic Information Systems and land restoration.

Climate Resilience

Mr. Speaker, an essential element of our climate resilience efforts is our ability to tap into existing climate financing frameworks to support adaptation and mitigation initiatives. Through strategic partnerships with the Green Climate Fund (GCF), we have secured substantial support for a broad range of climate resilience projects, many of which are already underway or in advanced stages of planning.

The GCF has approved EC\$ 6.8 million in support of Dominica's transition to a low-carbon economy. Funding is available for the assessment and design of shore power infrastructure for maritime transport, especially cruise vessels, and the design of data and cloud storage facilities powered by geothermal energy.

This means that Dominica is taking concrete steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in key sectors. The shore power infrastructure will allow docked cruise ships to plug into the island's electricity supply, powered by cleaner energy, instead of running their engines, which burn fossil fuels and emit harmful pollutants. Designing data and cloud storage facilities powered by geothermal energy positions Dominica to support digital development in an environmentally sustainable way. Both initiatives contribute to our goal of building a low-carbon, climate-resilient economy.

Dominica is also undertaking an economic feasibility study to explore the development of a Green Industrial Eco-Park. This park would serve as a hub for environmentally friendly businesses and industries that operate using renewable energy and sustainable practices. The study will assess the potential for attracting green investments, creating jobs and supporting low-carbon manufacturing and innovation. The findings, expected by December 2025, will help guide the next steps in establishing the eco-park as part of Dominica's broader green growth strategy.

In addition, the GCF is supporting capacity building within the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development to help strengthen legal and policy frameworks related to resilient housing. In practical terms, it will support the process of issuing official titles to individuals and families who have been granted homes by the Government, ensuring they have full legal ownership and long-term security.

Final approval is anticipated by the end of 2025 for the Dominica Community Resilience Enhancement Project (DOMCREP), an EC\$65 million GCF grant proposal. Implementation is

expected to begin in 2026, targeting climate adaptation and resilience-building in nine communities, including Colihaut, Coulibistrie, Warner, Good Hope and Bagatelle.

Mr. Speaker, this Government understands that resilience begins with our natural systems. Our efforts are creating economic opportunities and equipping Dominica to confront the impacts of climate change head-on. We will continue to invest in the health of our ecosystems and the partnerships that support our journey to a sustainable and resilient future.

Solid Waste Management

Mr. Speaker, solid waste management, especially our disposal practices, has become a major concern and topic of public discourse in Dominica. It is therefore imperative that we strengthen our systems to maintain a clean, healthy and sustainable environment for all.

As we continue to address the challenges of waste management, Government will reform the operations of the Dominica Solid Waste Management Corporation so that it could better fulfill its mandate with greater efficiency, ensuring timely collection and adherence to established schedules.

To support this effort, Government is undertaking several key initiatives during this fiscal year:

- Six new garbage trucks have been procured. Two of these trucks will arrive by August 1, 2025, while the remaining four are currently enroute and expected to arrive by early October 2025;
- We have begun work on the decentralisation of the landfill from Stock Farm to relieve pressure on a single location and better serve communities in other areas;
- We will establish a dedicated dumpsite for derelict vehicles, white goods and tires to address environmental and safety concerns;
- Collection of garbage will also be decentralised with garbage trucks positioned across districts. Local authorities will be empowered and incentivised to collect and provide oversight;
- Government will also purchase four additional tipper trucks which will be placed in select communities to enhance the collection and disposal process;
- We will restructure and strengthen the operational capacity of the Corporation including increased staffing and resources to improve coverage and service quality; and

- Public education and promotion of greater community responsibility will be heightened by encouraging and supporting citizens to properly sort, store and dispose of waste, and to take ownership of the cleanliness of their surroundings.

Mr. Speaker, the Government accepts full responsibility for the collection and disposal of solid waste in Dominica and we will make no excuses in ensuring that this is done effectively and efficiently. The measures that I have articulated this morning will no doubt enhance the Corporation's capacity to deliver improved services across the island.

But at some point, Mr. Speaker, we as citizens and residents of our beautiful country, will need to have a conversation about our individual financial contribution towards the collection and disposal of our waste- clearly, the idea that government should do it alone, must come to an end. So, at some point, Mr. Speaker, after consultations, we will have to return to this Honourable House to present recommendations from the general public about our individual and collective financial contributions to the collection and disposal of our waste in Dominica to preserve the health of our environment and uphold our standing as the Nature Island of the Caribbean.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Mr. Speaker, this Government has recognized that a robust health system must be grounded in equity and driven by strategic investments that positively impact on every citizen, in every community.

Over the past years, we have made significant and transformative strides in advancing healthcare. We have upgraded primary and secondary care infrastructure, outfitted these facilities with state of the art equipment, financed the training of several health personnel, created and upgraded staff positions, all of which have contributed to the expansion of traditional health services as well as introduced services which were not available in country. All of these have enhanced the overall experience of our citizens seeking care.

Our efforts to build a robust health care system for a healthier nation continues in this Fiscal Year. At the Primary care level, we will focus heavily on prevention mainly through immunization and education. Non-communicable diseases NCDs account for three of every four deaths in the country. Therefore, with an NCDs Unit already in place, greater attention will be given to combatting NCDs.

Several initiatives are ongoing and this year, we will launch two major awareness programmes to promote food literacy and healthy choices through nutritional labeling, school partnerships, and increase access to locally grown, nutritious produce. In addition to educational and promotional activities, we will conduct screening of students for NCDs, physical activity campaigns, mental wellness outreach and parental education.

Even with these initiatives, Mr. Speaker, citizen responsibility in combatting NCDs cannot be overstated. Each of us must take ownership of our health. Adopting healthier lifestyles can change lives. The impact of NCDs is not just statistical; it is personal. We all have friends, family, and loved ones whose lives have been negatively impacted by these diseases. It is incumbent upon all of us to safeguard our health.

As part of our ongoing efforts to strengthen nutrition and food safety, we will soon introduce a Food Safety and Security Bill to Parliament, aimed at ensuring higher standards in food production, handling and distribution for the protection and well-being of our citizens. Collaboration amongst our nutritionists in the health sector is already underway to promote better nutritional practices among our citizens.

Prevention of disease through immunization is also critical. Dominica has made significant progress in immunization coverage, rising from 76% to 90% within one year.: This year, we will make a much-needed change to the immunization of infants. We will switch from pentavalent vaccines to the hexavalent vaccines which will reduce the number of inoculations for our infants. In addition, preparations are being made to introduce the Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine 20 in 2026 to help infants and vulnerable elderly combat seasonal flu.

To bolster public health resilience, Dominica is participating in the Pandemic Fund Project in partnership with the World Bank, PAHO, and FAO. With an investment of \$9.2 million, this initiative will modernize disease surveillance systems through the purchase of software and equipment, upgrade laboratories, train personnel and improve emergency preparedness.

Mr. Speaker, Dominicans can now boast of having one of the most modern hospitals in the Caribbean where citizens can access MRIs with contrast, transesophageal echocardiogram, angiology surgical services, ophthalmology services at our eye care centre of excellence, ICU in each ward, functional A& E with theatre among others.

However, this Government is aware of the criticism and concerns of the public regarding the care they receive in some instances. In this fiscal year, we will address this and other matters with concrete action:

1. We will appoint a full-time Executive Chairperson to strengthen the governance, accountability, transparency and to assure overall the delivery of high-quality patient care.
2. In addition to the post of Chief Executive Officer, we shall appoint a Clinical Director who will have the equal rank of Chief Executive Officer, reporting directly to the Executive Chairperson. This individual will be responsible for overseeing the clinical and medical services and to ensure that we can address patient concerns in a proactive manner.

3. We will engage an Accreditation Coordinator for the Dominica China Friendship Hospital to guide us towards international good practice and accreditation in order to enhance the quality and credibility of our healthcare services;
4. We will establish a Patient Support Unit at the Hospital to improve communication and responsiveness to patients and their families. That Unit will also work closely with the recently revamped Quality Department to ensure that patients receive the best quality care.
5. The Medical Professions Bill and the Nursing and Midwives Bill will be presented to the Parliament in September 2025. These bills will seek to address the rights and professionalism of our health practitioners and the prioritising of the welfare and safety of patients.
6. The new structure for the nursing service, which was established in the last financial year, will continue to be implemented in this financial year.
7. Eleven new medical specialist positions will be created effective August 1, 2025, to ensure that all specialists are appointed in permanent positions; and
8. An upgraded remuneration package will be approved for the medical specialist and other medical positions no later than August 6, 2025.
9. To further motivate the nursing and medical services, this year, Government will launch a financial reward programme for outstanding performance. This programme will begin at the Dominica China Friendship Hospital where patients and supervisors will evaluate the level of care provided by the doctors and nurses. A total of ten awards will be granted per quarter to the most outstanding performers for the period.

Mr. Speaker, one of the most impactful initiatives for health care in Dominica is the Health Management and Information System which is currently being developed at a cost of \$15.5 million.

This transformative initiative will enhance the delivery of healthcare in Dominica as it will integrate patient records, diagnostics, and treatment histories across all facilities—hospitals and health centres, as well as streamline clinical, financial and operational functions. It is envisioned that the integrated patient administration module, the first of 49 modules, will be go live by December 31, 2025.

Once fully operational, the system will boost continuity of care, efficiency in diagnosis and treatment, and reduce processing time as patients records will be stored in that system and readily available.

Mental health, Mr. Speaker, is another key priority. Government, with the support of the Pan American Health Organization, began a review of the mental health policy and legislation in June 2025. The aim is to establish a modern, rights-based community-oriented system that integrates mental health into primary care. Expanded counselling in schools, communities and the police and public services will support early intervention and reduce stigma. These initiatives are expected to better support the mentally vulnerable population.

I want to assure our citizens that this Government is fully aware of the challenges within our health sector and we are deeply committed to addressing them with urgency and purpose. Our vision is to build a truly patient-centered health system, one that prioritizes accessibility, quality care and equitable service delivery for every citizen, regardless of location or circumstance. This means investing in infrastructure, technology and training, and practicing compassion, respect and accountability. We are building a health system that promotes wellness, empowers healthcare professionals and restores public confidence through consistent, efficient and dignified care.

SOCIAL PROTECTION

Mr. Speaker, this Dominica Labour Party Government can boast of its deep commitment to the care and protection of our most vulnerable citizens. We pledge to continue to uphold and strengthen the robust and responsive social protection system we have established to safeguard the dignity and well-being of those most in need.

In this fiscal year, we will maintain our support through direct financial assistance, improved access to healthcare, and targeted programmes for the elderly, persons with disabilities, children and single-parent families, ensuring, as we have always done, that every individual feels seen, valued and supported.

Our approach is based on the principles of equity and compassion. We are investing in proven initiatives such as the Yes We Care Programme, the Over-65 Non-Contributory Pensions, the school feeding programme, free uniform and books, free transportation for students, construction and repair of homes, among others. Further, we are empowering our citizens through training, education, access to finance and small business development, helping individuals move from vulnerability to self-reliance.

Mr. Speaker, we reassure our citizens that your well-being remains our top priority. We will maintain our social protection systems to ensure that every citizen, regardless of circumstance, has a fair and equal opportunity to live a dignified and fulfilling life. That is a promise we will uphold.

EDUCATION

At this juncture of our economic and social advancement, it is imperative that we rethink and revamp our education system to meet the evolving needs of our students and country.

Education reform is not just a necessity; it is an opportunity. By embracing innovative approaches, we can unlock the potential of our students, foster critical thinking and equip them with the skills required to thrive in an ever-changing world.

By prioritising education reform, we invest in the future of our nation. We empower our children to become active citizens and leaders. We bridge gaps and create a more inclusive, adaptable society.

Mr. Speaker, while we intend to review the entire education system, we have chosen to begin with Early Childhood Education and Primary Education. That process will begin in earnest in September 2025.

We believe that every child must be grounded in the basics of literacy and numeracy but also exposed to a wide range of practical and creative skills, including agriculture, art and music. This must be balanced with a focus on the child's mental and physical well-being, through sports and other activities that nurture holistic development.

A reformed education system, Mr. Speaker, must produce students who are not only equipped with knowledge, but who also possess critical thinking and analytical skills, an entrepreneurial spirit and a deep sense of compassion for humanity and the environment.

Our goal is clear. It is to nurture and produce well-rounded Dominican citizens, who possess the creativity to innovate, the confidence to lead and the values to contribute meaningfully to society.

To support this vision, Mr. Speaker, we need school environments that match the kind of education we want for our children. That's why we have made major investments to upgrade our school facilities across the country.

Work is progressing steadily on the construction of six new schools-Goodwill Secondary, Tete Morne, Bellevue Chopin, Thibaud, Calibishie and Sineku Primary. These facilities remain on schedule for completion and handover in 2026. Notably, over 100 local jobs have been created through the construction of these schools.

The schools are being constructed to create safer, more resilient and better-equipped learning environments for students and teachers alike. They will feature upgraded classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and digital infrastructure to support modern teaching and learning practices.

I am especially pleased to highlight that the Goodwill Secondary School will be designated as Dominica's first Center of Excellence for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). The center will deliver specialised skills training in areas such as hospitality, food preparation, agriculture, electrical installation and digital technologies, ensuring that our young people, and those seeking new opportunities, are equipped with practical, in-demand skills for the workforce.

Mr. Speaker, the Dominica State College has established itself as the premier tertiary institution in the country, and over the past 23 years, it has produced graduates who have gone on to excel at universities across the Caribbean and around the world.

That notwithstanding, in light of the evolving demands of the global education landscape, shaped especially by rapid technological change, the Government of Dominica has recognized the importance of undertaking a comprehensive review of the Dominica State College. This review will critically assess the institution's mandate, structure, programmes and operations to ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness. To facilitate this process, an external consultant has been engaged.

Education Facility at the AID Bank

Mr. Speaker, our long-standing investment in education has enabled thousands of Dominicans to pursue tertiary-level training, supported through direct government grants and low-interest student loans provided by the AID Bank.

As we transition into a new phase of national development with the construction of the international airport, the establishment of the Cabrits Marina, and significant advancements in geothermal energy exploration and plant construction, the demand for additional skills within the workforce increases.

To ensure that our people are prepared to take advantage of these emerging opportunities, Government will allocate an additional \$2 million revolving fund to the AID Bank specifically for on-lending to young Dominicans at the concessionary interest rate of 2 percent. This facility will be targeted at those wishing to pursue studies in high-demand areas such as engineering, aviation, renewable energy, environmental sciences and other technical disciplines such as electrical installation, plumbing and woodwork.

Mr. Speaker, this investment reflects our determination to strengthen our human resource base and ensure that our people are well-positioned to benefit from our national development efforts.

THE PUBLIC AND POLICE SERVICES

Mr. Speaker, the Government recognizes that the Public Service makes a critical contribution to national development. We therefore continue to reaffirm our commitment to strengthening the Public Service, investing in its capacity, and improving conditions of employment for all officers. Our public officers are the backbone of our nation, the teachers who shape our future, the healthcare workers who save lives, the police officers who provide protection and public safety, and the public officers who deliver services to the public and who keep our systems running.

Government continues to prioritize security of tenure of Public Officers. During the 2024/2025 Fiscal Year, a total of 361 public and police officers' received permanent appointments-an increase

of 24% over the 2023/2024 period. Included in this amount is the permanent appointment of 84 teachers. Additionally, 85 positions were created to regularize non-established officers to facilitate their permanent appointment in these positions. These officers have been serving in a non-established capacity for extended periods in positions deemed to be critical to the Public Service.

The positions are: Youth Sports Officers, Cultural Officer, Surveyor Assistants, Phlebotomist, Pharmacy Technician, Conductors, Customs Guard, Data Entry Clerk, Dental Surgery Assistant, Park Wardens, Environmental Health Officer and Rural Library Assistant.

A collective bargaining agreement was finalized with the Police Welfare Association in March of this year and includes payment of an 8% salary increase for the 2024/2027 triennium. The salary increases have been effected for Police Officers and a total amount of \$465,554.47 in back pay was paid in May 2025 to Police Officers.

Effective July 1, 2025, all Police Officers will be paid risk allowances of \$450 and \$250 monthly based on assignment. Travelling allowance has also been increased by 20% and an annual subvention of \$25,000 paid to the Police Welfare Association.

The Dominica Association of Teachers has accepted Government's proposal while negotiations with the Dominica Public Service Union are still ongoing, however Government has made offers regarding salary increases, increases in allowances, support to the Unions and other benefits to Public Officers. Additionally, an internal task force has been established to investigate and make recommendations with respect to Pension Reform for the Public Service. The review is ongoing, and it is the Government's intention to implement recommendations on a phased basis after consultations with the Union.

Mr. Speaker, the public relies on the Public Service to deliver critical services in every sector. It is therefore important to build the capacity of our officers to efficiently provide high quality services to the public. We will therefore continue to focus on training and capacity building for officers to increase their knowledge and competencies in the fields that they serve and implement new standards for delivery of services across the public service.

Opportunity Knocks-2 Percent Housing Programme. (OK2HP)

Mr. Speaker, in our continued efforts to make homeownership more accessible and affordable, particularly for lower-income earners, the Government is introducing a special housing loan facility targeting public and police officers.

An initial sum of \$10 million will be allocated to the Government Housing Loans Board to provide low-interest housing loans to public officers earning a basic annual salary of \$45,000 or less. These loans will be offered at an interest rate of just 2 percent, significantly easing the financial burden associated with homeownership. A grace period of six months will also be applied, giving beneficiaries time to advance construction before repayments begin.

This initiative is dubbed “Opportunity Knocks-2 Percent Housing Programme” (OK2HP) for public and police officers.

This initiative reflects Government’s commitment to supporting the welfare of public officers and ensuring that more citizens can access safe, secure and dignified housing. By reducing the cost of financing, we are empowering our public servants, many of whom are young professionals, to invest in their future, build equity and contribute to the continued growth and stability of their communities.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Speaker, this Government remains steadfast in its commitment to building resilient communities, empowering youth, promoting national identity and enhancing social and economic infrastructure across the country. In the 2024–2025 fiscal year, we implemented a wide-ranging portfolio of impactful projects and programmes—from major infrastructure upgrades to youth leadership training, vibrant community sports initiatives, and cultural revitalization efforts.

Under the Basic Needs Trust Fund (BNTF) X Programme, Government invested EC\$6.5 million in critical community projects. Among these, the Paix Bouche Water Enhancement Project, now 90% complete, will serve over 1,040 residents upon completion. Additional investments supported the restoration of the Clifton Back Road, the Grand Bay/Dubique Multipurpose Centre, the Delices Playing Field and the Trafalgar Basketball Court, all contributing to improved quality of life in these communities.

Mr. Speaker, as part of our commitment to climate resilience, cultural preservation and community empowerment, construction of the Kalinago Multipurpose Centre and Emergency Shelter is progressing steadily in the community of Bataca.

The total contract sum for the Centre is EC\$7.6 million, with a contractual duration of 16 months. As of today, the project is six months into implementation, with EC\$1.2 million worth of works already certified.

Once completed, the Multipurpose Center and Emergency Shelter will significantly enhance the disaster preparedness and cultural resilience of the Kalinago community. It will accommodate 125 beds, and feature essential amenities such as washrooms, kitchen and dining facilities, food and material storage, general and emergency operations offices, a first aid centre, library, computer lab, and dedicated parking, including spaces for persons with disabilities.

To ensure operational continuity during emergencies, it will be equipped with backup communication systems, a solar power generation system, a standby diesel generator, and a 15,000-gallon water storage capacity. The structure is engineered to withstand seismic activity and

category-five hurricane winds, in alignment with Dominica's climate-resilient infrastructure principles.

Mr. Speaker, beyond its emergency shelter function, the Centre is designed to serve as a vibrant cultural hub. Its architectural design draws on Kalinago heritage and folklore, incorporating elements inspired by L'Escalier Tête Chien, Majini Peak, and traditional basket-weaving patterns. Eco-friendly features such as passive ventilation, rainwater harvesting, and solar energy contribute to its environmental sustainability.

We look forward to the completion of this important project and the many social, cultural and economic benefits it will bring to the Kalinago people and the nation.

Mr. Speaker, investing in our youth continues to be a top priority. During the last fiscal year, the Youth Development Division delivered 230 leadership sessions and skills training courses in areas such as Photoshop, QuickBooks and Digital Electronics. Preparatory work was also undertaken to expand Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ) and National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) certification programmes in Information Technology, hospitality and emerging trades-ensuring our young people are equipped with market-relevant skills.

In partnership with the Dominica Youth Business Trust, 75 young people received training in entrepreneurship development, business pitching, content creation and social media marketing. These efforts are designed to align youth with the economic opportunities being created by Government, and to ensure they are well positioned to contribute to national development.

Mr. speaker, the government continues to make significant investments in sporting infrastructure as part of a broader vision to strengthen grassroots sports and further decentralize sporting opportunities. Several community playing fields have been upgraded with lighting to extend play hours and promote greater community participation, while new multi-purpose hard courts have been developed to provide additional recreational spaces for youth engagement.

Meanwhile, Government has embarked on a major lighting upgrade at the Windsor Park Sports Stadium to enable the hosting of both local and international sporting events. This is to the tune of EC\$13.9 million and is being financed through the Dominica National Lotteries.

We are proud of Government's track record in supporting and promoting our athletes and sporting organizations. During the past year, financial support totalling EC\$1.1 million was provided to individual sports personalities and national sports organizations in recognition of their contributions and achievements. We believe that sports offer a unique and exciting opportunity for our young people, and we remain committed to working with our youth in the new financial year.

To enhance the enabling environment for sports development, the National Sports Council advanced its work on the review of the current sports legislation. A legal professional has been

engaged to assist with the drafting of necessary amendments. Once this process is complete, consultations will be held with stakeholders before advancing this timely piece of legislation.

Mr. speaker, the Government is also supporting a dynamic and growing field that holds significant potential for youth engagement is alternative sports or non-traditional sports. These include biking, water sports, street sports, mountain climbing, trail running, among others. This year, we see the hosting of the second annual Bike Fest, and various cycling tournaments, all supported by the Ministry of Tourism, the Discover Dominica Authority and the Government of Dominica, as part of our continued commitment to promoting sports tourism.

Mr. Speaker, during consultations with sporting and cultural organizations last month, we heard a consistent call for greater support particularly in the areas of sports development, community engagement, youth empowerment and the preservation and promotion of culture.

In response, starting this fiscal year, Government will provide annual subventions to sporting and cultural clubs and organizations which have been in existence for more than five years. The amount allocated will be based on the size and scope of each organization. This initiative reflects our commitment to supporting grassroots movements and investing in the creative and athletic talents of our people.

HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Speaker, Government continues to drive the resilient housing agenda through major projects in Grand Bay and Eggleston, as well as ongoing works in Woodford Hill, Penville, and other communities, with the aim of delivering 256 homes under the Modern Resilient Housing Development Programme.

Mr. Speaker, we were poised to deliver 21 homes to deserving beneficiaries in Scotts Head on Wednesday. Unfortunately, the weather did not permit. The fact is the beneficiaries already have their keys, but we shall set a date immediately after the budget is passed to formalize the handover.

Further, Mr. Speaker, 16 families will benefit in August from the homes in Eggleston. We expect, that by January of 2026, we would have handed over a cumulative amount of 210 homes to deserving families across Dominica.

Efforts to grant title ownership to beneficiaries of government housing programmes are underway with the appointment of a state attorney solely dedicated to the acquisition of titles for recipients, with first priority being given to those displaced by Tropical Storm Erika.

The Housing Recovery Project made a significant impact by building and delivering 382 resilient homes and resolving land ownership issues for 172 families. In addition to improving living

conditions, the project generated employment for hundreds and created meaningful opportunities for local contractors and businesses across the country.

Mr. Speaker, preparations for the relocation of families of Campbell, Petite Soufriere, San Sauveur and Good Hope are well advanced. Infrastructure to facilitate construction is in place at both the Castle Bruce and Warner sites. Several consultations have been held with the stakeholders. Home designs and bid documents have been completed; funding has been secured, and it is expected that Government will begin awarding contracts for the construction of these homes by September 2025.

Though this is an expensive undertaking, Government is committed to ensuring the safety and comfort of the families.

Works have started on the model homes under the Future Housing Development Programme. There are presently two model homes under construction at the Warner site while a third is to be constructed at Cotton Hill in Portsmouth. Once these three modern homes have been completed, applicants will be invited to select their designs. Young professionals and public officers can access the requisite financing on concessionary terms, as government has already negotiated special interest rates with the National Bank of Dominica and the National Cooperative Credit Union, which are partnering with us on this programme.

In addition, Government sold 45 housing lots last year and in this new financial year, we will make available for sale 177 lots, majority of which will be sold to public and police officers at concessionary rates.

Work is ongoing to regulate the rental property market through revised rent control legislation to balance tenant and landlord interests and ensure affordable rental housing. This work is being spearheaded by an Advisory Committee comprising public and private sector membership. Consultation on the proposed new policies will begin by the second quarter of this Fiscal Year. We anticipate that the new legislation will be in place by the end of this Fiscal Year.

Additionally, a Northeast (International Airport area) land use plan is under development with the assistance of grant funding from the Caribbean Development Bank while a new Geographic Information Systems Unit was established during last fiscal year to support integrated data driven development across sectors.

In respect to Urban Development, Mr. Speaker, during the last Fiscal Year, preparatory work for the continuation of the Roseau Enhancement Project, specifically the rehabilitation of six streets, progressed, although at a slower pace than expected. This was primarily due to delays in the procurement process. However, I am pleased to report that a dedicated Project Implementation Team is now in place, and tenders for the supervision of works are being evaluated. It is anticipated that a contract for supervision will be awarded by August 2025. Mr. Speaker, the engagement of both the implementation and supervision teams are key requirements under our Agreement with the Saudi Development Fund, the financiers of this important project.

The pace of implementation is expected to accelerate in the upcoming months, and we anticipate that the request for tender for the works will be issued by October 2025, and a contract awarded by January 31, 2026.

This is one of the most essential projects for our country. It will not only contribute to user comfort and safety but also to improved urbanization, enhancement of commerce and beautification of our city in a manner that befits the beautiful nature island.

The Government will embark on a programme which will facilitate the acquisition of properties in Roseau for commercial purposes. So, Mr. Speaker, if someone is interested in the acquisition of a property in Roseau and is experiencing challenges due to family disputes or issues of ownership, the government shall acquire the property in the public interest and sell it to the interested party. This will eliminate the hassle to the potential buyer and place the property in productive use for the overall enhancement of the City.

Reserve Parking Fee

Additionally, with the growing economic activity in Roseau as well as the increased number of vehicles in the Country, Government will begin to address the parking challenges in Roseau.

As a start, Government will limit the number and sizes of the ‘reserved parking’ slots in Roseau and impose a fee of \$1,000.00 for standard sized parking.

This fee will be payable by the first day of every quarter starting October 1, 2025.

This initiative along with the vacant lots we intend to lease, will increase the parking options for the public.

REVENUE MOBILIZATION

Mr. Speaker, I have just presented a summary of the Budget for this fiscal year and will now speak to the financing of this Budget. We propose to fund the Budget through a combination of Government’s revenue, loans and grants together totalling \$1,315.4 million.

The estimates are as follows:

- Recurrent revenue: \$1,103.7 million
- Capital revenue: \$5.2 million
- Grants equivalent to \$117.7 million
- Loans at \$88.8

It should be noted that these loans have already been approved by Parliament. The loans and the grants are all earmarked for capital projects. The other capital projects along with the recurrent expenditure will be financed by the \$1,103.7 million recurrent revenue estimates.

The recurrent revenue estimates comprise tax revenues of \$443.9 million, \$635.0 million from the CBI, and other recurrent revenues, such as fees and licences totaling \$24.8. Of the amount of \$443.9 million in tax revenues, we anticipate that a total of \$46.0 million will be collected in respect of arrears of payments to Government for taxes, licenses, lands and hospital fees. Let me at this point commend the staff of the Inland Revenue, the Police Officers and the staff of the Ministry of Housing for their extraordinary efforts with regards to arrears collection during last Fiscal Year. Last Fiscal Year, Government collected \$47.6 million in arrears. Ninety-five percent of this amount was arrears of taxes collected through the efforts of the staff of the Inland Revenue Division—an increase of 30 percent over their previous year's performance; while 4.6 percent was collected as a result of the efforts of the Police.

Mr. Speaker, we would like to applaud those who cooperated and made those payments as well as those who make their payments on time and regularly. It is clearly a sign that they appreciate that Government needs these resources to continue to provide the essential services to the population including health care, education, national security, road maintenance; as well as infrastructure and programmes for the welfare of our citizens, effective governance and the economic development and sustainability of our country.

We urge all citizens and residents to play their part and make their financial contribution, on time, when required, for the running of the state. We have relied heavily on the CBI over the past ten years. This has allowed Government to implement a host of developmental and social projects and programmes without increasing taxes. However, given that most of the CBI resources are currently being allocated to the construction of the International Airport, and the international policy changes which could reduce CBI inflows, now is the time to accelerate efforts to become less reliant on CBI.

Furthermore, Government's objective is to achieve a primary surplus of at least one percent in this Fiscal Year and at least 2 percent thereafter in line with the requirement of the Fiscal Responsibility Framework Resolution approved by Parliament in 2021 which takes effect from Fiscal Year 2026/2027.

To this end, I propose a few measures to augment tax revenues.

1) Reinstatement of the Highway Maintenance Levy

A Highway Maintenance Levy was first introduced in Dominica in Fiscal Year 2015/16.

That Levy generated \$10.4 million up to the time it was repealed in Fiscal Year 2022/23. Of the \$10.4 million, \$3.1 million was spent on the rehabilitation of Charles Avenue while the remaining \$7.3 million was used to fund routine road maintenance.

With the impact of climate change, and the increase in the number and weight of the vehicles on our roads, road maintenance and rehabilitation have become more costly.

Therefore, effective October 1, 2025, the highway maintenance levy will be reintroduced at the same \$100 for private vehicles and \$50.00 for motor cycles; while the Levy for commercial vehicles, truckers, dumpers and trailers will be as follows:

| | | |
|---|---|-----------|
| 1 | less than 6721 lbs | \$ 150.00 |
| 2 | more than 6720 lbs but less than 8961 lbs | \$ 200.00 |
| 3 | more than 8960 lbs but less than 13441 lbs | \$ 250.00 |
| 4 | more than 13440 lbs but less than 20161 lbs | \$ 300.00 |
| 5 | more than 20160 lbs but less than 26881 lbs | \$ 350.00 |
| 6 | more than 26880 lbs but less than 33601 lbs | \$ 400.00 |
| 7 | more than 33600 lbs | \$ 500.00 |

That Levy is payable to the Comptroller of Inland Revenue once a year at the time of payment of the motor vehicle licence fee prescribed under the Vehicles and Road Traffic Act.

2) Eco-Tourism site user fees adjustment

Mr. Speaker, given the rising cost associated with the maintenance and management of **Eco-Tourism sites**, fee adjustments are proposed as follows, effective October 1, 2025:

- a. US\$20.00 for a day pass to visit any eco-tourism site or sites except the Waitukubuli National Trail; and

- b. US\$50 for a week pass to visit any eco-tourism site or sites except the Waitukubuli National Trail.

In addition, also starting October 1, 2025, Titou Gorge and Cold Soufriere will be added to the list of sites for which the eco-tourism site user fee applies.

Note, Mr. Speaker, that the current US\$3.00 for a site visit for pre-sold organized tours to any eco-tourism site except the Waitukubuli National Trail; and the fees for visits to the Waitukubuli National Trail remain unchanged.

Importantly, these user fees do not apply to residents of Dominica.

3) Nature Island Fund

Since last Fiscal Year Government increased its budget allocation for the marketing of 'Destination Dominica'. The allocation now stands at \$15.0 million and there is need to further increase this amount once revenue permits.

To defray some of the marketing and increased passenger processing costs, effective January 1, 2026, visitors to the island will be required to pay a fee of US\$30 per visit.

Again, this fee will not apply to residents of Dominica.

4) Adjustments to the charges on the import of Motor Vehicles

Mr. Speaker, the number of derelict vehicles on the roadside in Dominica is unfortunate, unsightly and inconsistent with our branding as the Nature Isle.

As we speak, Government through the Police, is undertaking a massive clean-up exercise by removing these derelicts from the streets to the land field. This is proving to be a very costly exercise, and the state must find some means of recovering the cost from the owners.

In the meantime, Government is taking action to reduce the import of old vehicles and encourage domestic trading of used vehicles, by adjusting the charges to be paid at the Customs.

Mr. Speaker, we have decided to review the environmental surcharge on imported vehicles as follows:

- a. Motor vehicles manufactured 5 years or less: remains at 1 percent of the CIF value;
- b. Motor vehicles manufactured more than 5 years but up to 10 years: remains at \$3,000;

- c. Motor vehicles manufactured more than 10 years but up to 15 years: \$4,000
- d. Motor vehicles manufactured more than 15 years: \$10,000

In addition, the excise tax rate on motor vehicles manufactured 10 years or less which presently attract 28 percent excise tax, will be reduced to 25 percent.

The changes to the environmental surcharge and the excise tax rates will take effect from October 1, 2025.

Also Mr. Speaker, to further achieve Government's objective of encouraging the import of newer vehicles and domestic trading of used vehicles, a person who imported a vehicle and received waiver or exemption of import duty, value added tax or excise tax at the time of import will not be required to pay any tax to the Comptroller of Customs or the State if that vehicle is sold more than five years after it was imported.

This policy applies to any vehicle which is sold after July 31, 2025.

OTHER MATTERS OF NATIONAL INTEREST

Addressing the Cost of Living

Mr. Speaker, we are fully aware of our citizens' concerns regarding the rising cost of living, and this Government has taken firm, targeted action to provide relief where it matters most.

One measure we have implemented is the removal of customs duties and Value Added Tax (VAT) on a range of essential food items. This policy is designed to ease the financial burden on households by reducing the cost of basic goods that form part of the daily diet of our people.

The list of items currently benefiting from these exemptions includes:

| FOODS ITEMS WITH NO IMPORT DUTY | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Chicken- Backs and necks | Rice |
| Chicken- Wings | Oats |
| Codfish | Cream of Wheat |
| Herring | Cooking Oil |
| Salted Mackerel | Sausage |
| Milk | Canned Sardines |
| Butter | Canned Mackerel |
| Cheddar Cheese | Canned Tuna |
| Garlic | Sugar |
| Onion | Pasta |
| Split Peas | Couscous |
| Red Kidney Beans | Margarine |
| Lentils | Cereal (Corn Flakes, Raisin Bran) |
| Green Tea | Apple Juice |
| Black Tea | Infant Formula |
| Flour | |

| FOODS ITEMS WITH NO VAT |
|--|
| Milk |
| Flour |
| Rice |
| Sugar |
| Infant Formula |
| Locally Produced Agricultural Products |
| Locally Produced Bread |

| FOODS ITEMS WITH NO VAT & NO IMPORT DUTY |
|---|
| Milk |
| Flour |
| Rice |
| Sugar |
| Infant Formula |

To continue supporting families across the country, we will be expanding the list of exempted items in the upcoming financial year for a period of six months.

Exemption of Value Added Tax on:

1. SALTED HERRINGS
2. CODFISH
3. ONIONS
4. GARLIC
5. SPLIT PEAS
6. RED KIDNEY BEANS

7. BLACKEYE PEAS
8. LENTILS
9. PIGEON PEAS (CAJANUS CAJAN)
10. CREAM OF WHEAT
11. CORNMEAL
12. OATS
13. LUNCHEON MEAT
14. CANNED CORNED BEEF
15. CANNED HERRING
16. CANNED SARDINES
17. CANNED TUNAS
18. CANNED MACKEREL
19. CEREALS (WHEAT, BRAN, ETC)
20. BISCUITS, UNSWEETENED
21. ORANGE JUICE
22. TOMATO KETCHUP
23. TOOTHPASTES
24. LAUNDRY DETERGENT
25. TOILET PAPER
26. SANITARY NAPKINS

Removal of Import Duty on:

1. PIGEON PEAS (CAJANUS CAJAN)
2. LUNCHEON MEAT
3. CANNED CORNED BEEF
4. CEREALS (WHEAT, BRAN, ETC)
5. BISCUITS, UNSWEETENED
6. ORANGE JUICE
7. TOMATO KETCHUP
8. TOOTHPASTES
9. LAUNDRY DETERGENT
10. ALMOND MILK
11. SOY MILK

These additions will take effect October 1.

Mr. Speaker, it is important that we also examine our consumption habits. While Government has taken steps to ease the burden, there are additional ways in which we, as individuals and households, can reduce expenses.

One such measure is the revitalization of backyard gardening, which can provide fresh vegetables and herbs year-round, lower food bills and promote healthier eating. We also encourage citizens to purchase local produce which is often more affordable and fresher than imported alternatives.

Mr. Speaker, Government will continue to implement policies to ease the financial pressure on our people. We, as citizens, must build a culture of financial mindfulness, resourcefulness, and community cooperation. It is this collective effort that will make our society more resilient and better equipped to withstand global economic pressures.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Speaker, this Government is the only Administration since 1989 to take decisive action to review and increase the minimum wage in Dominica. Section 5(1) of the Labour Standards Act grants the Minister the authority to fix a minimum wage by Order.

In 1997 a minimum wage review was ordered but the recommendations of the Minimum Wage Advisory Committee were never implemented. It was not until 2008, under this Administration, that a revised minimum wage was introduced. This marked the first real effort to uplift the earning power of low-wage workers.

Mr. Speaker, at the time of approval of the new minimum wage in 2021, the Government committed to undertaking a further review in 2023. However, this review was delayed due to the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Accordingly, and in keeping with Section 6(1) of the Labour Standards Act, the Minister for Labour will appoint the Minimum Wage Advisory Board to review existing wage rates and to make recommendations for new minimum wage levels.

It is the Government's intention that the new recommended rates will take effect October 1, 2025.

It is our sincere hope that this review will lead to meaningful improvements in wages which not only meet basic needs but also support the aspirations of our people for a better, more secure and dignified life.

Strengthening Investment Climate

Government continues to pursue strategic initiatives aimed at improving the investment climate in Dominica. Our efforts are focused on creating an enabling environment which attracts new investment, stimulates private sector growth and creates economic opportunities for our people.

Major infrastructure projects such as the construction of the international airport, the development of the Cabrits Marina, and our continued progress in geothermal energy exploration are laying the foundation for increased business activity.

These developments will significantly enhance our connectivity, reduce energy costs and expand the services sector, thereby positioning Dominica as a more attractive destination for foreign direct investment and local enterprise alike.

Incentives for Investment

Mr. Speaker, this Government recognises the private sector as an indispensable engine of national development. We have therefore resolved to provide targeted, meaningful support to both local and foreign investors through a fiscal incentives regime, administered by the Invest Dominica Authority.

As we speak, forty-one (41) companies are benefitting from a range of concession packages. These include exemptions on import duties for hotel supplies, operational equipment, vehicles and raw materials. Qualifying businesses also enjoy a tax holiday on eligible expenditures and VAT waivers on capital imports until operations commence.

Over the last 18 months the government has granted concession packages to twenty-one (21) businesses. Their proposed investments over the next two years total approximately EC\$79.5 million and are expected to create 242 permanent jobs and generate additional short-term employment.

The manufacturing sector is gaining serious momentum, with two of Dominica's largest manufacturers expanding and two new manufacturing enterprises set to launch this year collectively injecting EC\$35 million into the economy. Furthermore, the local private sector is earmarked to invest EC\$8.5 million in the growing tourism sector, particularly in accommodation services.

Mr. Speaker, this Government is not waiting for investment to happen. We are aggressively pursuing opportunities and creating the conditions for new enterprises to thrive.

Loubiere Water Bottling Plant

Mr. Speaker, as part of our ongoing efforts to diversify the economy and generate sustainable employment, Government is making targeted investments in industries that add value to our abundant natural resources.

One such promising initiative is the development of a modern water bottling industry, a sector in which Dominica holds a natural competitive advantage.

I am therefore pleased to announce that the Government will move forward with the acquisition of the former Dominica Brewery site in Loubiere for the establishment of a modern water bottling facility.

We are currently in advanced negotiations with a foreign investor who will partner with the Government to bring this project to life. Once operational, the plant will bottle and brand our pristine water for export to high-demand markets, particularly in Europe and the United Kingdom.

We anticipate the creation of more than 100 direct jobs in plant operations, bottling, distribution, quality control and maintenance. Furthermore, this venture will generate indirect employment in areas such as trucking, packaging, marketing and logistics.

Mr. Speaker, this project speaks to our commitment to creating meaningful, long-term employment for our people, right here at home.

Incentives to Attract Foreign Film and Photo Productions to Dominica

Mr. Speaker, Dominica's potential as a world-class film destination was spotlighted globally when scenes from the Pirates of the Caribbean franchise were filmed on our shores. That experience showcased our island's unmatched natural beauty to millions around the world and provided meaningful economic opportunities for a range of local service providers.

The success of that production and its lasting impact on our people demonstrate the power of film to drive visibility, create jobs and stimulate multiple sectors of the economy.

In light of these proven benefits, the Government is taking steps to establish a viable and sustainable film industry in Dominica to attract international film and photo productions, expand employment and project our Nature Island to global audiences.

Dominica's breathtaking natural beauty, diverse landscapes and rich cultural heritage make it a compelling backdrop for filmmakers. By capitalising on these unique assets and removing barriers, we can position Dominica as a competitive and desirable location for global productions.

To this end, in February of this year, we appointed a Film Commissioner, tasked with leveraging his expertise and industry connections to position Dominica as a premier destination for international film production.

To support this initiative, Government will implement a series of targeted incentives to attract film projects and reduce production barriers. These include:

1. Tax-free imports of all film-related goods, lowering the cost of equipment, props and materials;
2. Work permit waivers for crew and talent, to eliminate bureaucratic delays and facilitate efficient entry for production teams;
3. No location fees for the use of government-owned and historical sites, making our iconic landscapes more accessible while showcasing our natural and cultural heritage; and
4. Government-supported security and policing, to ensure the safety of cast, crew and equipment, and to reinforce Dominica's reputation as a secure and reliable filming destination.

Mr. Speaker, by establishing Dominica as a film-friendly location, we are opening new economic opportunities for our people and securing global visibility for our island.

Physical Planning Approvals

Mr. Speaker, the Physical Planning Division is responsible for land use and construction approval and plays a guiding role sustainable development, ensuring that projects are implemented in a manner that is orderly, safe, and aligned with our broader national objectives. However, as demand for new construction rises, the need for greater efficiency and responsiveness within the Division has become increasingly urgent.

Over the years, we have heard repeated concerns about the lengthy processing times for building permits. This has been a persistent challenge, and it is one that this Government resolved to address.

In this fiscal year, we will take steps to improve the Division's operations and service delivery. A dedicated team will be appointed to undertake a comprehensive review of existing procedures, with a clear mandate to recommend measures that streamline processes, reduce delays and improve the overall client experience.

We will also amend the relevant legislation to provide for the appointment of an Executive Chairman. This new position will be tasked with implementing reforms to modernize the Division's operations, enhance responsiveness and provide greater accountability.

Importantly, the Executive Chairman will also guide the Division in adopting a more strategic and future-focused approach to handle the complex and high-value development projects expected from 2027 onward.

Job Opportunities

Mr. Speaker, I have just outlined an extensive slate of investments by the Government, and foreign and local investments facilitated by the Government, ranging from our largest project, the international airport, to the Marina, geothermal development, the hotels, the Cable Car, tourism air access, product development and market, agriculture production, digital economy, marketing and trade, small business, health, education, housing, sports and our youth.

These investments are creating thousands of temporary and permanent job opportunities for citizens and residents of our country. In the infrastructure sector alone, particularly in road construction, over 1,000 individuals are currently employed. This is further complemented by job creation in the traditional pillars of our economy, including tourism, agriculture, retail and manufacturing.

We fully expect to see continued job creation through spillover effects, especially as these projects transition from construction to operational phases. We are confident that the foundations are being firmly laid for thousands of permanent jobs, sustained economic growth and eventual economic take-off.

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, these investments-both by government and the private sector- are being made to create jobs for our people to ensure they have money in their pockets, food on their table and the ability to improve their standard of living.

Further, Mr. Speaker, we continue to work on improving the climate for doing business in our country to ensure that existing businesses can continue to make money with the hope of reinvesting some of those profits, thereby creating more jobs for our people. We will continue to work with the private sector to identify any impediment to investment in Dominica and work towards addressing them.

Law and Order (Judiciary)

Mr. Speaker, law and order is the foundation of a free and democratic society, and the judiciary is a fundamental pillar of our governance system. In this fiscal year, Government will enhance the efficiency, and effectiveness of the legal system, and the rule of law.

In this regard, we shall collaborate with regional and international partners, including the Partnership of the Caribbean and the European Union on Justice (PACE Justice) Regional Programme and the Europe Latin America Programme of Assistance against Transnational Organised Crime to ensure that cases are disposed of more effectively and expeditiously, and that justice is not only done but is seen to be done.

The reality is Mr. Speaker, there are times, too often, when cases take way too long to be concluded. We must put systems in place to continue to reduce the backlog of cases and the time cases take to be concluded.

It is unfair to anyone to wait up to 15 years to have their matter concluded before the court. The Government has therefore, mandated the Attorney General to review and advise on what parliament can do to remedy the situation.

Additionally, a decision has been taken to bring the Magistracy under the jurisdiction of the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court. This transition will strengthen oversight, improve case management and bolster the administration of justice and for greater synergy which we hope will benefit the citizens of Dominica.

Mr. Speaker, we also anticipate the commencement of Night Court sessions during this fiscal year. This initiative was previously considered but for various reasons, did not progress.

However, we are now confident that it can be successfully implemented and will create a more accessible and cost-effective system, particularly for members of the working population who are unable to attend court proceedings during regular work hours. Together, these reforms will contribute to a more responsive, transparent, and people-centred justice system in Dominica.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Speaker, this Government is investing in the future of our country and laying the foundation for sustainable growth and shared prosperity. Every initiative undertaken, every dollar spent, every policy crafted is aimed at improving the lives of our people and building a society where opportunity is within reach for all.

We are building an economy that is expanding through strategic investments in public infrastructure, agriculture, education, tourism and innovation.

We are laying new roads to improve access and mobility across the country; constructing resilient homes to provide dignity and security to families; and supporting the development of new hotels and tourism facilities to generate jobs and stimulate enterprise in our communities.

We continue to welcome new investments, such as the American Canadian School of Medicine, which has grown in its student enrollment and presence in Portsmouth. This institution is enhancing our profile in medical education and stimulating economic activity in the north through housing, transportation, retail and services.

Mr. Speaker, our agriculture sector is also undergoing expansion. Through access to financing, modern equipment, and technical training we are giving added life to farming and agro-processing, creating real opportunities for farmers and rural entrepreneurs.

A new water bottling plant is also coming on stream, adding further value to our natural resources, creating jobs and strengthening the export sector.

Small businesses remain a key engine of economic growth. This Government continues to provide financial support, training and technical assistance to help micro and small enterprises grow, innovate and become more competitive.

Our education reform agenda, Mr. Speaker, will involve revamping of the curriculum to better meet the needs of a dynamic world, ensuring that every child, regardless of where they live or their background, receives a quality education that equips them for the real world.

We are modernizing school infrastructure, reducing subject overload at the primary level, introducing technical and vocational skills such as agriculture and visual and performing arts, and working to create a more inclusive, student-centered system, because we believe that the true wealth of a nation is the knowledge, values and competencies of its people.

We are investing even more in the police to ensure that our country remains safe to live and visit.

Mr. Speaker, we know that the road has not been easy. We have been responsive to the needs of our people but at the same we have demonstrated great responsibility and prudence in the management of our country's economy.

We inherited a fragile economy in the early 2000s, and since then we have had to confront global economic crises, the COVID-19 pandemic and multiple natural disasters, including the devastation of Hurricane Maria.

And yet, through it all, we have remained focused, stabilising the economy, restoring livelihoods and investing in our people.

There are still challenges. But we cannot ignore how far we have come.

Today, Dominica is fast becoming one of the most desirable places to live in the Caribbean. We are attracting individuals and families from across the globe who choose Dominica for its natural beauty, for its peace, safety and the quality of life we offer.

That alone speaks volumes about the success of our policies and the growing confidence in our country.

We are also witnessing an increase in the number of young Dominicans who live in the diaspora in the current positive state of our country by building their homes and investing.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is not a time to sit back and be complacent. This is not a time for reckless prescriptions. This is a time for responsible action. This is a time for unity and focus.

Government has done its part and will continue to lead with purpose. Now it is left to each of us as citizens and residents to play our part.

Let us be civic-minded. Let us be law-abiding. Let us be constructive and engaged. Let us be ready and willing to seize the many opportunities now emerging before us.

The Dominica we are building is not for a few. It is for all. And so, I say to every farmer, teacher, nurse, builder, entrepreneur, entertainer, student, youth...the moment is now.

Let us meet it with confidence. Let us embrace it with determination. And let us continue to move forward as one people, one nation, one Dominica.

We thank our many development partners, some of whom are seated in the parliament today, for their continued support and encouragement.

We thank our God for the many blessings and successes that he has bestowed upon our country.

May the God we serve bless this Honourable House.

May he Bless the People of Dominica.

May he Bless our efforts.

May God Bless the Commonwealth of Dominica.

I thank all my fellow citizens, and I thank you, Mr Speaker. Let's all go forth and be constructive, positive participants in nation building.