



Central Manchester Member of Parliament's QUARTERLY REPORT TO CONSTITUENTS

Peter Bunting - Member of Parliament for Central Manchester

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Dear Constituents,

I am pleased to present my third quarterly report as your Member of Parliament, covering the period April to June 2008.

PARLIAMENT

The activities of Parliament during the quarter were dominated first by the Budget Debate and then by the Sectoral Debate. I presented in the Budget Debate as one of three participants for the Opposition and made, inter alia, the following points:

On Alternative Investment Schemes:

"Last January [2007] in this House, as Opposition Spokesman on Finance, he [Audley Shaw] had a lot to say in defense of these schemes – advocating that "...entrepreneurs of all types can coexist and flourish, where they are welcomed and not constantly alienated, where they are allowed to take their risks and yield high profits or suffer the consequences of their high risk-taking propensities." This was in stark contrast to the statements of all the responsible players in the Financial Sector... all of whom were warning the public about the risks and dangers of these schemes. The problem I have with the statement by the Minister is that it's not the entrepreneurs who suffer the consequences of their high risk taking propensities, but those 40,000 Jamaicans who may have their life savings wiped out. Does the Minister feel a sense of responsibility towards these persons, many of whom have their life savings at risk?"

The Minister of Finance refused to accept any responsibility for his statement and instead tried to divert attention from the real issue. My constituents can be assured that I will continue to hold the Government and its members accountable for their statements and their actions. The recent investigation and apparent collapse of Olint now warrant a renewal of my question to the Minister of Finance.

On Inflation:

"The Government has sought generally to take a hands-off approach to this matter of inflation, blaming it on imported costs of food and energy. However, when we compare our rate of inflation with other CARICOM countries, it is revealing. Our rate of inflation is more than twice the CARICOM average even though they are subject to the same imported food and energy factors. Therefore, the difference must be due to local factors."

The Prime Minister did not respond to that point in the Debate but he has recently admitted in Parliament that the price of fertilizer is about US\$50 per bag in another CARICOM country (St. Vincent) while it is almost US\$100 per bag in Jamaica, confirming my point. Hopefully, the Government will now take some responsibility for mitigating the high inflation ravaging the quality of life of Jamaicans.

On the overall budget:

"This budget is hostage to the political need to be seen as fulfilling election promises [Free health care and education]. The result is that in real terms, it i) reduces capital spending on our productive infrastructure, and ii) reduces the non-wage recurrent expenditure which compromises the capacity of the public sector to deliver even the existing levels of service to the public."

Already what is being experienced at our hospitals is a shortage of drugs and supplies, even though staff are going the extra mile to keep the system functioning. Frustrated patients of the Mandeville Regional Hospital wait long hours to fill prescriptions at the hospital's pharmacy only to eventually learn that the drugs are not available.

I am also receiving reports from constituency Principals and school boards that the budget increases from the Ministry of Education for the upcoming school year are in the region of 12-15% over last year and will be grossly inadequate to cover costs such as electricity and water which have increased between 50% and 100% during the year! The Prime Minister recently accused Principals of extortion but the Government should not use Principals as scapegoats when they have been given baskets to carry water.

My full budget presentation text is available on our website (www.bunting.org.jm) or from the constituency office.



CONSTITUENCY

Constituency Development Fund

There were no disbursements of funds from the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) for Central Manchester (or any constituency that I'm aware of) during the reporting quarter. This occurred notwithstanding the fact that projects were submitted and approved in good time.

Central Manchester Principals Association

This quarter also saw the revival of the Central Manchester Principals Association. I reconvened the Association under the Chairmanship of Mr. Byron Farquharson (of Mandeville Primary & Junior High) and it will be a resource group to keep me abreast of all the factors affecting our children, their educational institutions, and the surrounding communities. They will also provide vital input regarding the needs of our schools for the Constituency Development Plan.



Members of the Central Manchester Principals Association pose with the MP for a group shot.



Mayor and MP planting a palm tree at Manchester Infirmary on Labour Day.



MP hosts Fun Day at Manchester High School for 400 children.



Resource Centre coaching applicants for job interviews in the hospitality service industry.

Constituency Resource Centre

Our Resource Centre is now up and running and being utilised by all age groups. Courses currently offered include *Introduction to the Computer*, and computer aided literacy. We have commenced discussions with a view to becoming an approved centre to offer the High School Equivalency Programme (HISEP) in the upcoming quarter. The centre is also being used to deliver a computer based component of a Nurses Training Programme being conducted at the Mandeville Hospital.

Additionally, the Centre facilitates some of our training and employment initiatives. We recently provided training in job application and interviewing for a batch of 21 applicants for hospitality service training with one of our prominent hotel chains. The hotel chain's management anticipated that they would employ ten persons but after the interviews they were so impressed with the level of preparation that they made offers to 19 of the 21 interviewees.

The successful applicants are being offered accommodation, a stipend, and the possibility of permanent employment pending the outcome of their training. My congratulations to the Resource Centre team.

I would like to express my gratitude to those citizens who have volunteered to teach classes!

Sincerely,

