



His Excellency Sir Rodney Williams, KCMG

Governor-General of Antigua and Barbuda

Delivers the Speech from the Throne

CREATING SUSTAINABLE WEALTH:

MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

Thursday, December 20, 2018
Parliament Building
Queen Elizabeth Highway
St. John's, ANTIGUA and BARBUDA

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

I wish you and your families a joyful and blessed Christmas, and a healthy and prosperous 2019.

I am pleased that Minister Michael Browne, the Representative of All Saints West, is present in this Chamber today. The Minister of Education is recovering from an episode involving pain in his chest, which frightened us all. May God grant you the strength and power to overcome every challenge to your health and wellness. A blessed Christmas to you and your family, Minister.

While wishes of well-being and prosperity are repeated each end-of-year, the opportunity to reflect upon and to examine the record of the years past is **infrequently** undertaken by individuals. Democracies, however, have the obligation to review performance and to report to their publics. My democratically-elected Government, through this annual exercise, reflects upon immediate past-performance and shares its plans going forward, focusing primarily upon the year ahead.

Nonetheless, 2018 marks an important milestone for at least one enterprise and several institutions that compel a brief look-back at our commercial and political history exactly 50 years ago. I, therefore, wish to begin this important annual statement by reflecting on three significant celebrations held in this year, 2018, marking 50 years of advancement along several fronts.

First, The West Indies Oil Company (WIOC) this year celebrated 50 years since it commenced the production and export of fuels, in January 1968. WIOC is one of the many success stories of Antigua and Barbuda. It re-shaped the industrial history of a nation that, before WIOC, was dependent upon sugar plantations and a sugar-producing factory. WIOC spawned a housing development boom, 50 years ago; and, the oil refinery caused a rapid increase in the roster of skilled workers. Many entered here from other Caribbean countries, when the WIOC construction began in 1964, and many Antiguan learned new skills which benefitted us all. The WIOC presence achieved the economic diversification that Sir Arthur Lewis proposed under his theory of “industrialization by invitation”—a novel approach to

development that the governing Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party adopted, and which won Arthur Lewis the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1979.

WIOC is today a very profitable company, owned 51% by my Government. It pays taxes and dividends that have, in these past three years, exceeded the amount for which 51% ownership is vested in my Government. Congratulations to my Government! Congratulations to the West Indies Oil Company, at 50!

On October 31, 1968, fifty years ago, the St. John's Deepwater Harbour became operable, welcoming its first cargo vessel to Rat Island. Prior to the two-years of dredging and piling—and the construction of a warehouse and an office building—large ships remained four miles out, beyond Sandy Island. Smaller vessels would travel out to sea to receive cargo, and then bring the shipped goods back to shore. That system existed for hundreds of years. The administration of V.C. Bird, elected for a fifth consecutive term in 1965, changed those circumstances by 1968. The Deepwater Harbour is a success story that is frequently overlooked. However, the expansion and growth of the Antigua and Barbuda economy from that year onward could not have been achieved without that engineering marvel; it allowed the huge ships to discharge cargo and visitors directly on to our shores. The decision-makers of fifty years ago deserve our applause.

On November 24, 1968, 50 years ago, the oldest yet the newest political party was created here. Having functioned as the Political Committee of the Antigua Trades and Labour Union, since 1943—when Luther George proposed such a hybrid construct—the formal creation of the Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party in November 1968 was the outcome of a historic challenge. The formation of the Antigua and Barbuda Workers Union, in 1967, followed by the founding of its political arm, the Progressive Labour Movement, triggered the need for a matching political construct, both intended to win the hearts and minds of the electorate. History reveals that the ABLP has lost three general elections, beginning in 1971; and it has won seven. Its governance has therefore spanned 35 of these past fifty years. Congratulations to the ABLP for decades of leadership in the nation which it has shaped and developed, moreso than any other single institution across our 170 square miles of land. Congratulations!

Although the ABLP separated itself out from the AT&LU in 1968, both institutions remain inextricably bound. Let history therefore recall that on January 16, 2019, or

twenty-six days from today, the AT&LU will celebrate 80 years of contribution to nation-building. On January 16, 1939, the AT&LU was founded. The importance of trade unions in the transformation of every Commonwealth Caribbean country attests to the wisdom of our forebears. The power of workers, as expressed through their trade unions, remains a fact of Caribbean civilization that shapes our material well-being.

The unity of labour is still the salvation of our country. Congratulations AT&LU!

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

During the months of November and December 2018, my Government made good on its promise to meet the backpay owed to workers for negotiating periods going as far back as the year 2000. Nearly \$35 million dollars were distributed to public employees in satisfaction of unpaid salaries and wages, negotiated by their seven unions going back 18 years. Securing that much in financial resources, for paying salaries and wages owed, was a herculean task. The Prime Minister is to be applauded for his leadership and commitment.

The applause is richly deserving for an undertaking that required a love of justice, and unrelenting pursuit of fairness for workers. My Government's advice to all those who received this money is to spend wisely.

In 2018, my Government also agreed to, and began paying, a 5% increase in wages and salaries across the board to all government employees. The Treasury reports that the monthly wages and salaries expenditure is the highest it has ever been in our history. The economists report that the income of government employees is now competing favorably with incomes paid by private-sector employers; yet, my Government is of the view that the public sector ought never to become the employer of first choice. The competition for talent is fair; nevertheless, attracting talent ought never to be lopsided.

My Government wishes to encourage the nation's bold and youthful entrepreneurs to seek to create economic opportunities for themselves and their families, as the economy continues to grow and to expand. Antigua and Barbuda's economy is the

fastest-growing in the Caribbean and is listed as the fourth fastest-growing economy in all of the Americas. That is not an accident.

Success is the result of prudent decision-making, taking calculable risks, and attracting millions in new capital to those sectors that are the most productive. Our entrepreneurs must make the best of this period to profit and to build sustainable wealth, such that future generations need not start at the bottom. While the creation of jobs is our primary object, the creation of new economic opportunities for bold entrepreneurs is also at the heart of my Government's policy choices. We are moving forward together.

Last week, my Government passed into law the Cannabis Act. This piece of legislation carves out a place for the Rastafarian community and for farmers. The intent is to ensure that any risks which are taken to create new wealth, must confer benefits on segments of the nation's population that may have been overlooked in the past. My Government believes in the empowerment of our nation's people, the equitable distribution of national wealth, and equality of opportunity and justice for our people. These are guiding principles which determine the policy choices that my Government shall always abide.

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

In June 2014, when my Government took control of the reins of power, it inherited a distributed bandwidth in the 850 megahertz band that was spread among two of three telecoms firms. APUA-PCS was not a participant. Yet, along this bandwidth is to be harvested very lucrative roaming fees. The one million tourists visiting us each year, who utilize their cell phones and other devices to be in touch with their homes, provide a lucrative roaming base.

My Government believes it is fair to divide the 850 megahertz band equally among the three service providers, such that each will now have an equal share of the space. The re-distribution of bandwidth in the USA is common, and will cause no hardship to any of the two existing carriers. Redistribution will allow APUA to share in the benefits, as the tourism sector is grown by my Government. The Minister of Public Utilities has provided superb leadership in this quest.

Antigua and Barbuda has always had a unique arrangement in our region ever since telephones began to be supplied to homes and businesses, more than 70 years ago. Our forebears saw the wisdom in owning the local exchange, and allowed an international firm to bring calls to our shores but to terminate the calls using the government-owned telephone exchange.

The profits from telecommunications were utilized to ensure that every household, no matter how poor, had access to clean drinking water. Standpipes erected in every village and community were intended to ensure that those who could not afford piped water in their homes, could access clean drinking water at no cost. There would be no need to drink Cook's Pond Water, or water from any contaminated source. That policy remains in place and drives my Government to ensure that profits from the 850 megahertz band are justly distributed. My Government is creating sustainable wealth, as we move forward together.

My Government is very thankful that the heavens have opened and showers of blessings have descended. November 2018 was a good, rainy month. Yet, the drought persists. Six million gallons of desalinated water are continually required daily, even after the surface and groundwater storage-systems are partially replenished by rainfall. My Government continues to pray that rain and sunshine, ever sending, will fill our fields with crops and flowers. Also, that the old pipes that carry water from the source to the homes and businesses can be quickly repaired when they break, so that very little inconvenience is suffered by consumers.

My Government is also doing its very best to ensure the wellness of our population, by emphasizing lower consumption of sugary foods and drinks. The challenge posed by non-communicable diseases—such as hypertension, diabetes and obesity—compels a policy intervention. In order to discourage consumption of the harmful excess, my government will impose a tax on sugary drinks that are at the heart of this unhealthy lifestyle. Wellness is an achievable outcome for the entire population of our small-island state.

In that regard, my Government expresses its thanks to the People's Republic of China for the team of eye specialists on the bright journey, who spent two weeks this year removing cataracts from the eyes of more than 350 Antiguan and Barbudans. Further, that very important developmental partner also dispatched the Peace Ark Hospital Ship with teams of specialists who examined and treated

more than 4,000 Antigua and Barbuda patients. Our thanks go out to the People and Government of China for their never-ending generosity.

My Government expresses its thanks to the Republic of Cuba for the Medical Brigade which it has dispatched here; the doctors, nurses and other specialists have brought significant alleviation from pain and suffering. Their contribution to healthcare is expressed everyday by their treatment of patients at the Mount St. John Medical Center. Thank you, Cuba.

The training of Antigua and Barbuda students to become doctors, by Cuban universities, is worthy of our applause. The ambition of the smartest among us to turn their talent into relieving suffering and healing the sick is noble. The role of Cuba, in securing places for talented youth from our country to become doctors, engineers, architects, and other professionals remains a proud Caribbean development, attesting to South-South cooperation within our region.

My Government is aware that more than 7,262 citizens and residents of our country are blind in at least 1 eye. We know that conditions like Cataract, Pterygium, Glaucoma and Diabetic Retinopathy are leading causes of avoidable blindness. My Government is also aware that there is a high prevalence of Myopia, Astigmatism and Hyperopia in Antigua and Barbuda. These conditions are major causes of visual impairment among children and adults, starting in early teenage years. My Government, led by the Minister of Health and Wellness, is determined to reduce and eventually to eliminate all forms of avoidable blindness in our country. The Caribbean Council for the Blind deserves our thanks for its work here.

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

The foreign policy of our small island-developing country is—and has been—very carefully crafted and very well-executed. Our diplomats abroad have demonstrated the excellence for which the West Indies cricket team was once known. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has epitomized the intelligence for which thirty-seven years of independence have prepared us. My Government may not have yet succeeded in receiving the payments due to Antigua and Barbuda, as a result of the

WTO judgment in our favour. However, to have pursued and to receive a favourable WTO judgment, transforms Antigua and Barbuda—among the smallest of states within the United Nations and the World Trade Organization—into a giant of a country. My Government plays by the rules and calls on every state, large and small, to do the same. My Government is devising new strategies to compel the payment of the just award.

In our region, Antigua and Barbuda continues to display leadership of a very high caliber. The O.E.C.S., the CARICOM, the Association of Caribbean States, and the score of other institutions that help to identify possibilities and to benefit the state, have been vigorously pursued. My Government will continue to pursue a derogation from the CARICOM free movement agreement, believing that Antigua and Barbuda has fulfilled its obligation. No other CARICOM country can boast as large a mix of nationals from throughout the region per capita as does our twin-island state. We are unique and we are beautifully Caribbean.

My Government expresses its thanks to the Caribbean Development Bank and the Caribbean Development Fund for the roles they have played in on-lending capital for our country's development. While our population did not embrace the Caribbean Court of Justice in the referendum held last month, my Government's commitment to justice and the CCJ will never wane.

My Government continues to address issues of importance to our national interest and our economy in our relations with the United States and Canada. It is noted that both Canada and the United States of America enjoy perennial trade surpluses with Antigua and Barbuda, despite the much smaller size of our economy. The trade imbalance demonstrates the purchasing power of Antigua and Barbuda, resulting from a very successful tourism product that requires consumables from these tourist-originating states.

In our relationship with both Canada and the United States of America, ease of securing first-time visas and visa renewals for our nationals will be a continuous feature of my Government's ambitions. Antigua and Barbuda has had a cooperative and supportive relationship with Canada and the United States for decades preceding and following Independence. In all those decades, an insignificant number of incidents of illegal border crossings have been recorded. Therefore, while my Government recognises the intensified border security concerns of these

two third-border states, it is justly expected that continued progress will be recorded in the quest for normalcy in visa-issuance to Antigua and Barbuda citizens.

The United Kingdom, Canada and the United states were once Antigua and Barbuda's most important developmental partners. These very wealthy states, committed to transferring 0.7% of their GDP to development, have fallen far short of the goals. Other states have stepped into the breach. Nonetheless, my Government recognizes its own responsibilities to those less-fortunate among us and continues to spend scarce resources on those who find themselves in the grips of crises.

My Government reaffirms its commitment to the indigent, to vulnerable groups, and to those who suffer disasters that are frequently not of their own making. The Home Advancement Program for the Indigent—the HAPI Program—has proven to be one of the most successful at rescuing those low income owners/occupiers of houses that have been burnt or destroyed, or made un-inhabitable by rot. By making repairs or providing re-constructed homes, those who cannot undertake home improvement because of income limitations can report that my Government has acted as a most caring administration should. Many older wooden homes were adversely affected by the harmful hurricanes and other disasters; the HAPI Program will begin utilizing concrete blocks in rebuilding homes, going forward.

My Government will build 350 new homes beginning next year, with the assistance of the People's Republic of China. One hundred and fifty homes will be constructed in Booby Alley, the Point. One hundred will be built in Bolans, and 100 new homes will be constructed in Barbuda. These affordable homes will be resilient and capable of withstanding Category 5 hurricanes. The national housing stock will be vastly increased by these additions. Concurrently, the National Housing Company's ambition to construct 500 homes will see that target reached and surpassed by this time next year. All homes constructed going forward will be built to withstand Category 5 hurricanes.

While my Government is very thankful for the absence of storms during this past hurricane season, the global climate change phenomenon still haunts the region and the world. Hurricane Irma caused more than \$600 million dollars in damages to Antigua and Barbuda. It is not possible for my Government to return to the international community with frequency to seek assistance following the passage

of destructive hurricanes. Though mitigation and adaptation policies are vigorously pursued by my Government, the ferocity of storms may nevertheless render some of our efforts pointless, depending on their frequency and intensity.

Regardless, my Government expresses its thanks to the many states and institutions that made contributions to the re-building effort in the post-Irma period, especially in Barbuda. The Republic of Cuba, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, and the People's Republic of China, present always by their Embassies in St. John's, have been among the most generous. Our thanks also go to the European Union. The EU has made available five million Euros (€5,000,000) through a facility called ***The Shock Absorber Mechanism***. This mechanism is designed as a mitigating measure to address shock and lack of fiscal space that face governments following natural disasters. The Minister of Foreign Affairs has done a remarkable job harnessing these resources.

The Dominican Republic has submitted plans for the building of a new primary school in Codrington. We are all very thankful for that country's generosity. The United Nations Development Program—the UNDP—is also thanked for its expertise in the disaster recovery effort. Several charities have also been helpful, especially in Barbuda.

The large states that continue to dump billions of tons of carbon dioxide, other unwanted gases and particulate matter into our earth's atmosphere, must cease and desist from that uncivilized behaviour. Our skies are not empty spaces. Complex processes take place in the skies above us, continuously, that determine climate and weather. Civilization cannot use our skies as a dumping ground in the production of goods and energy.

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

To demand changes in our energy production methods is of no lesser importance than the generational struggle to close the gender gap. It is an ambition which previous administrations also undertook. In government and in private enterprise, that drive towards achieving equality of opportunity for both genders has characterized the forward-looking states of the Commonwealth Caribbean region.

Given the many successes of this multi-decade campaign in Antigua and Barbuda, it would seem to my Government that special attention ought now to be paid to young males who are steadily losing ground to their female counterparts.

The number of UWI female graduates, it is reported, is three times as great as male graduates. That imbalance cannot be desirable or just. Our Caribbean civilization needs more men of high intellectual training; and our daughters need husbands who are equally yoked.

My Government is pursuing the establishment of the Fourth Landed Campus of the University of the West Indies at Five Islands and at three other locations, all to be ready by September 2019. The primary object is to make tertiary education and training available to hundreds more students annually, than is now possible. More males, my Government surmises, are therefore more likely to pursue baccalaureate degrees when that ambition can be more readily accessed right here in Antigua and Barbuda.

In order to ensure the availability of sufficient revenue to fund the university, my Government will look to three sources—external to tuition and fees—as a start. First, the Citizenship by Investment Program, that has yielded more than \$700 million dollars in economic activity since its inception in 2013, has been enlisted. The CIP now has a component that allows USD\$150,000 per applicant, to be contributed to the university endowment fund. Second, an insignificant levy on the profits of telecommunications and financial institutions will be imposed for the purpose of supplementing the Fund that will go exclusively towards financing the University's Fourth Campus. Third, in the 2019 Budget, a sum of \$10,000,000 (ten million dollars) has been allocated for the purpose of funding the Fourth Landed Campus.

Though my Government will utilize traditional sources, relied upon by universities around the world, to fund the Fourth Landed UWI Campus, many non-traditional methods will be explored in order to increase funding and to decrease the cost of tertiary training to students and their families. My Government expresses its thanks to the Committee that has been established to turn this dream into a reality, and to the Minister of Education who has demonstrated superb leadership.

Another dream nurtured by my Government has been to cause every Antigua and Barbuda household to have access to the several telecommunications systems that are now available to the peoples in the developed countries. 100% penetration is my Government's ambition. The Antigua Public Utilities Authority has significantly lowered the cost of broadband service; however, an investment in its own undersea cable in the amount of US\$20,000,000 (twenty million dollars) is about to be made. The object is to drive prices down further, and to ensure universal access and sufficiency of speed.

In trying to reach the population, radio remains the most convenient tool; nevertheless, both radio and television can now be accessed seamlessly on our smartphones. The National Broadcasting System is to be congratulated for the progress it has made to bring news, entertainment and useful information to the population. The advances of social media have led to the shrinking of our world; nothing of significance happens anywhere in the world which is not almost instantly communicated to the Antigua and Barbuda people. Antigua and Barbuda is on the cutting edge. My Government is fortunate to have two experienced, former executives in telecommunications' firms within its Cabinet.

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

Modern Antigua and Barbuda, 385 years old, came into being in 1634 because of the demand for sugar, tobacco, spices and tropical fruit in Europe. Agriculture formed the bedrock of the economy of Antigua and Barbuda for most of our years. Today, agriculture accounts for 3% of the economy. As the other sectors of the economy continue to grow, the ambition of my Government is to succeed at raising agricultural output.

Primary among the many objectives is the ambition to achieve a high level of food security. My Government is aware that a steady supply of water to farmers is an absolute necessity, if plentiful food is to be grown. In an era of persistent drought, water supply can be uncertain and expensive. For this reason, my Government has arranged with a friendly government to provide a desalination plant, capable of outputting 40,000 gallons of water daily. The plant is to be located near to Potworks

Dam, Bethesda, where many farms are located and where solar power can be utilized to drive the plant.

Further, the People's Republic of China has provided a team of experts to train farmers in the use of scientific methods for growing food in greenhouses and in open-field conditions. More than eight million dollars' worth of tools and equipment have been contributed by China towards this two-year project. By applying scientific measures in the production of food, my Government believes that more young men and women will be attracted to agriculture as a profession. The material and other rewards that come from farming are enormous, and will continue to impress.

Farming on Barbuda is also linked to successful agricultural production within the unitary state. Hurricane Irma severely impacted all sectors of the Barbuda economy, especially when the entire population was moved to Antigua. More than one-third of the Barbudan people have returned to their homes; however, very little food is being grown because of the challenge posed by roaming animals. Until fences and other secure measures are put in place, Barbudans will focus upon backyard gardening to supply local needs.

The need to make Barbuda contribute to the economy of the unitary state is critical. One-third of the land space of our small island-country cannot be continuously unproductive while deficits plague the Treasury, my Government believes. In order to bring Barbuda into the modern economy, my Government agreed to construct a modern runway that is 6,100 feet long; it will be capable of accommodating private jets and the aircraft-type utilized by our regional carrier. Three hotels are also to be constructed on Barbuda's south shore, costing more than US\$250,000,000 (two hundred and fifty million dollars) each. A new pier is also to be constructed near the River; that costly infrastructural project will allow cargo and cruise vessels to dock safely in Barbuda.

These investments in Barbuda are intended to make it a net contributor to the economy of Antigua and Barbuda. Today's youth will lead a different Barbuda, in time to come. Those adults who may wish to slow the progress by filing pointless lawsuits, intending to delay the forward movement, and designed to incur harmful losses, must by now have concluded that nothing will stop my Government's progress. Barbuda will become a significant contributor to this unitary state.

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

One of the cleverest decisions made by my Government to quickly grow the Antigua and Barbuda economy was to lower the cost of automobile ownership, in order to expand the transport sector rapidly. By reducing import duties and other taxes on passenger vehicles, many who would not ordinarily be able to own cars were put into a position to purchase previously-owned vehicles from exporting states.

The new owners were thereafter required to purchase insurance, pay registration fees, purchase gasoline, and buy maintenance services. The economic up-tick resulting from the addition of more than 7,000 vehicles on to the streets of Antigua and Barbuda is still to be accurately measured. Nevertheless, the Antigua and Barbuda Transport Board is now operating in the black after several years of deficits. The revenues from gasoline sales have increased significantly. But the number of accidents has also grown. My Government urges the car owners to exercise caution and to drive responsibly. Road safety is to be practiced by all.

My Government recognizes its own responsibility to keep the roads free of potholes and other dangers. The Ministry of Works is currently undertaking two capital-intensive road-projects, on Friars Hill Road and the Airport Road. Nearly \$51,000,000 (fifty-one million dollars) are being spent to improve these highways, to secure the electricity- and water-delivery systems by using new polyethylene pipes; and, to secure telecommunications cables, by placing them underground.

My Government reminds that it is un-reasonable to want crops without ploughing the ground; to want rain without thunder and lightning; to want the ocean without the roar of its many waters. (These are the words of Frederick Douglas, the African American Freedom Fighter.)

When these highways are completed by February 2019, let us pray that they will **not** be used for racing cars, for causing injury to the occupants of vehicles, or for causing destruction and death by reckless speeding. My Government encourages care and caution at all times, regardless of the quality of the roadway. The Minister of Works is attending methodically to all roadways that were inadequately ced in the 2004 to 2014 period; major repairs are required each time rain falls, which then

means major expenditure. So many other demands face the Ministry of Finance, that each of us is asked to exercise some patience on road repairs.

A little patience is also required in the distribution of land for housing. The 1967 purchase of the 33,000 acres of Syndicates Estates Lands and the Sugar Factory Lands, has resulted in more home-ownership in Antigua than in any of its OECS neighbours'. Antiguan and Barbudans became the proud owners of 65% of the land surface of their country with that purchase 51 years ago, and it has resulted in a housing boom that has not receded. The Central Housing and Planning Authority (CHAPA) has some lead responsibility. Notwithstanding CHAPA's role, the Minister responsible for housing has to be applauded for exercising significant supervisory control that was before usurped by others. Equity in land distribution for the purpose of housing is now more greatly assured.

The Land For Youth Program has been resuscitated and new housing is sprouting in virtually every community. A very useful program that had been shelved for 10 years is now back! The stock-taking of Crown lands reveals that 9,000 acres of agricultural land remains un-assigned. Great care will be exercised to ensure that those who apply for lands in order to farm, do not unreasonably build dwelling homes thereon. The Development Control Authority has been recruited to ensure strict compliance with the terms of leases granted to farmers.

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

The Terms of Agreement entered into between West Indies Cricket and Antigua and Barbuda, regarding the ICC Women's T-20 games, were decried by those who could not see the future. My Government had correctly anticipated that thousands of Antiguan and Barbudans would show an interest in these games. When the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium was filled to the brim on Independence night, Thursday November 1st 2018; and, when the Saturday night saw an even bigger crowd, many who had dismissed the women's games, then yearned for the games' presence in their countries. It was too late. The youthful Minister of Sports had done a superb job, and the ball was beyond the boundary by the time the competitors sought to have the action in their countries. This has been the Antigua and Barbuda way! We have always applied our thinking-power to planning, in order to address challenges which others fear.

Despite its victory at the stadium over the odds, my Government is very much aware that many providers of goods and services to Carnival and other festivities have not yet been compensated fully. A plan to organize Carnival and other festivities using a different model that does not result in deficits that linger-on, will be articulated by my Government before Carnival 2019.

The plan to fix YASCO and other playing fields around the country is being developed. Inadequacy of the fields results in lowered performance by our national athletes. That cannot be acceptable, my Government has declared. The Antigua Recreation Grounds, that historic acreage on which so many cricket records were made, will be renovated before December 2020. CARIFESTA 2021 is to be hosted by Antigua and Barbuda for the first time; it is imperative for us to put forward our best performance.

Our very best is also expressed in the engine of our economic growth. Tourism became the single-most important industry twenty years following the passage of the Hotels Aid Ordinance Act in 1952. Sugar production was abandoned in 1972 and tourism became king. While many doubted our country's chances of success at what they deemed a fragile industry, history has demonstrated that tourism is the most reliable economic undertaking which our country could have pursued.

In 1977, the gross domestic product of Antigua and Barbuda stood at USD\$66,000,000 (sixty-six million dollars). In 2017, the GDP of Antigua and Barbuda, catapulted by tourism, reached USD\$1,500,000,000 (one billion, five hundred million dollars).

Tourism is set for yet another take-off in Antigua and Barbuda. The three new hotel projects on Barbuda and the infrastructural projects there will add significantly to economic activity in the years ahead. The addition of more than 1,500 rooms in Antigua within the next 24 months will also ensure massive growth in the tourism sector. The building of a new pier at Point Wharf in order to accommodate the OASIS Class Ships—one of which docked in St. Kitts on Friday past—is a clear indication that growth is back, and superb leadership by our Ministry of Tourism and the Minister of Tourism will ensure that growth will not wane.

Cruise tourism arrivals, now standing at 750,000 arrivals will shoot past 1,000,000 by 2020. Overnight arrivals, now at about 300,000 will climb to more than 500,000

following the completion of the Half Moon Bay, the Waldorf, the Royalton Hotel across from the lagoon, the Lady of the Valley Resort, the Best Western at the Jolly Beach, the rebuilding of the Halcyon and the additional room stock which nationals will own, the multiple other hotel properties that will spring to life at Fort James, at Pearn's Point, at Dutchman's Bay, at Beachcomber, at Shell Beach, at the Verandah, and across the many bays and hillsides that look out on to the ocean. These will indeed take Antigua and Barbuda closer to the economic powerhouse standard which my Government years to achieve.

A Crypto currency exchange and the sale of medical cannabis will be two unconventional systems that will increase revenue to the Treasury, my Government has determined. Antigua and Barbuda will behave like the tortoise; we know that there is only one way to move forward, and that is to stick our neck out.

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

For four-and-one-half years, my Government has sought to create sustainable wealth, while attempting to move our people forward together. New wealth that remains within the economy, strengthens the effort. My Government is nevertheless aware that foreign direct investment continues to be the most sustainable method for growing the Antigua and Barbuda economy. Every effort is therefore made to attract new investments from abroad, knowing the mutual benefits that will flow to the enterprise, employees and the economy. While profits are usually repatriated, some retained earnings may remain behind to grow the enterprise.

A bank that brings capital to our shores, and whose astute management causes it to be profitable for many years, is a welcome enterprise that my Government continues to embrace. Its correspondent banking relations are secure, and its connection to a greater capital base is unquestionable. Its decision to sell its assets to a regional institution may be reasonably considered. However, to have it consider selling the same to a local banking consortium is a superior alternative.

The people of Antigua and Barbuda yearn for an even better life than now is offered. We are prepared to work hard and to sacrifice much, in order for us and our children to live a life that is full of achievements and successes. My Government's role is to so fix the arrangements governing enterprises that our material history, dating from our modern founding until 1939, shall not be re-enacted. Wealth-creation is intended to benefit the worker no less than the enterprise. Eighty years of trade unionism has secured that outcome.

Yet, those who are elected to lead by thinking and choosing are aware that history imposes a demand to be wise—in policy choices and in pronouncements. Judging from the achievements, commencing in June 2014, or in four-and-one-half years, my Government has chosen wisely and used the multiplicity of media shrewdly.

My Government has kept the people informed and made itself open to questioning, especially from the opposition media. The ambition of my Government has been to nurture a free media, while defeating our opponents fairly on the political battlefield. An early general election, last March 2018, fifteen months before an election was constitutionally due, is the most emphatic symbol of that mixed approach. Access to state media was unfettered and the opposition media had free rein.

The challenge to governance has now become thornier, with traps at every turn, requiring foresight and limited powers of predictability. Success is nevertheless guaranteed because the mix of skills and intuition characterizes those whom the people have chosen to lead.

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

The New Year promises to be prosperous. The year 2019 will be a good year for the people and Government of Antigua and Barbuda. I pray God's richest blessings will fall upon you, and I wish you all that is good in the New Year and beyond.

I thank you.