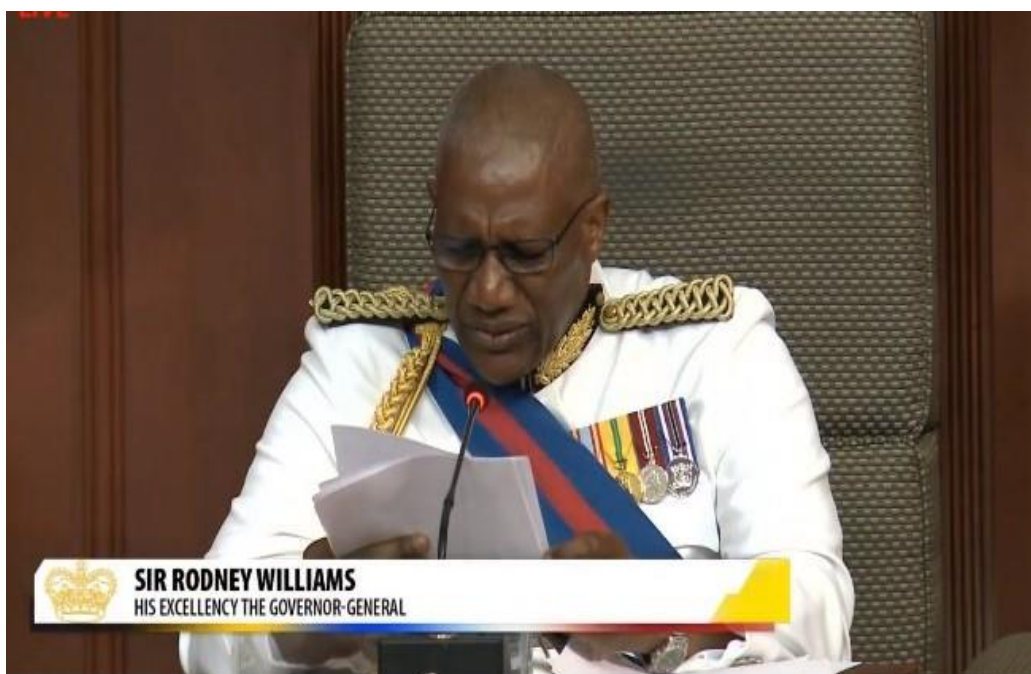




His Excellency Sir Rodney Williams KCMG
Governor-General of Antigua and Barbuda

Delivers the Speech from the Throne



**REBOUNDED FROM THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC:
ON COURSE FOR RECOVERY AND REBIRTH**

Friday, January 15, 2021
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:

Good Morning. I welcome back to these Chambers the Attorney General who was briefly hospitalized and advised by his doctor to rest. The entire nation prayed for your convalescence and the Parliament is very pleased to see you seated here today.

1. I begin by acknowledging that 2020 was not a year of perfect vision. Looking back, it was the most challenging year in a century, faced by all governments throughout the earth as the Covid-19 global pandemic derailed civilization. Our hopes for rebounding are justifiably pinned on the miracle of vaccines, the intelligence of the world's scientists, the patience of our people and the mercies of our God. Despite the continuing challenge posed by Covid-19, I pray that everyone in Antigua and Barbuda, by exercising due care and personal responsibility, will have a healthy 2021.

2. Further, my Government wishes to assure the new class of creative entrepreneurs, who emerged during Covid-19, that the New Year will be a year of increasing opportunity, of strong economic growth, and with multiple unstoppable pathways to wealth-creation. The wealth-generating machine, having been reduced to a crawl during these past nine months, is about to experience a brisk turnaround. While no-one can predict with certainty what any New Year will yield, growth in our country's tourism has already commenced; and, other sectors are beginning to recover. The decision by the USA and the UK to require Covid-19 Negative certificates of all people entering, may deter travel. Yet, the light at the end of the tunnel can be seen, the future is bright, and a better Antigua and Barbuda is emerging from this Covid-19 fight—injured but still standing.

(THE ECONOMIC RECOVERY COMMITTEE)

3. Last April 2020, weeks following border closures, my Government assembled a team of the smartest, the most talented and articulate leaders, in business, civic organizations and government, (quote) *"to re-engineer and to re-imagine every economic sector, in response to the adverse effects of the Covid-19 pandemic."* The language is drawn *verbatim* from The Terms of Reference of The Economic Recovery Committee (ERC). This think-tank was charged with the responsibility to

develop strategies that could be put into effect almost immediately while the crisis continues; and, to imagine strategies that are intended to yield growing benefits in the future, after the pandemic has been conquered.



4. The 200-page Report of the ERC—entitled: **ONE VISION ONE PURPOSE ONE NATION**—that has emerged from this national think-tank, is remarkable for its clarity and vision; it serves as a blueprint to guide my Government. The Cabinet of Antigua and Barbuda—whose members served as Chairpersons of the ERC’s various sub-committees—has been reliant upon ERC guidelines that inform and influence the Cabinet’s weekly, policy-making meetings. My Government’s plan for Willoughby Bay, growing out of the ERC proposals, will result in the creation of a new city in Antigua. It is remarkable in its ambition.

5. Next month, my Government will sell 10% of its share-holding in the West Indies Oil Company (WIOC), following the issuance of a prospectus. Another shareholder will also sell 10% of its WIOC shares, creating an opportunity for the average worker in Antigua and Barbuda to become investors in a very solid company. My Government encourages every household in Antigua and Barbuda to purchase those shares, knowing that the benefits of ownership in WIOC will redound to generations. Later in 2021, my Government will commence arrangements that will eventually lead to the sale of shares in State Insurance Company.



(2019 images from the Ribbon Cutting Ceremony of The Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) Tank Facility.)

(THE RE-OPENING OF BORDERS, LIAT (1974) Ltd., NEWLY REBUILT HIGHWAYS)

6. My Government did its best to mitigate the exogenous shocks from this pandemic. Primary among the strategies is to pay salaries and wages to all employees of the Government, on time and in full; and, not to lay-off a single public employee, as has happened in our Caribbean. All Government pensions were also paid on time. Our nation's economy did not collapse, our social safety net worked! The evidence is reflected in the recent Police report; serious crime has fallen. My Government's overarching object was to parlay our predicament into opportunities that would benefit our people.

Another important strategy was to be the first Caribbean country to re-open our borders to international flights. That strategy has garnered benefits that would not have been realized had the Cabinet delayed. That decision to open early was measured, intelligence-driven, prudent and the results attest to my Government's

wisdom. Several international carriers have expressed an interest in a hub and spoke arrangement with our regional air carrier LIAT.

7. My Government is absolutely determined to ensure that LIAT survives the Covid-19 Pandemic. LIAT will also overcome the additional challenges which it faced before Covid, and Antigua and Barbuda will make sure that LIAT returns permanently to the skies, and that its headquarters remain here. These are fitting ambitions. The regional airline that—for more than six decades—has provided the connectivity which the Eastern Caribbean countries require, cannot be allowed to die. LIAT is a CARICOM institution; it requires the support of all countries it serves, utilizing a minimum-revenue-guarantee scheme similar to that from which several non-regional carriers benefit. LIAT will be reorganized and made profitable!



(LIAT reemerges in the skies. Nov. 1st 2020.)

8. When the Year 2020 began, the cartoonists and the social-media commentators spent a lot of ink ridiculing the refurbishment taking place on the Friars Hill Road and the Sir George Walter Highway. My Government sought to secure the patience of drivers and the business-owners along the commercial strips, knowing that these two highways would be examples of outstanding engineering. The promised outcomes are now realized and the highways are of first-world magnificence. Sadly, their smooth surfaces are an invitation to reckless driving.

My Government urges the motoring public to please obey the speed limit and extend other courtesies intended to keep harm from being visited upon users. The \$18 million US Dollar grant, provided by the British Government, has been well-spent, by all appearances.



9. On these re-built highways, the APUA will bury the electricity cables, planted new water lines, secured telephone land-lines underground; the infrastructure along these highways will then be hurricane-proof.

My Government has secured a loan of \$168 million dollars for the APUA to strengthen the broadband product it offers by owning its subsea-cable, rather than pay usurious rental; and, there are orders placed to produce 4 million more gallons of water daily, by building greater desalinating capacity in order to satisfy the growing demand for more potable water. As the economy expands and drought returns, demand will increase; the APUA will repair the broken pipes in order to deliver the precious commodity with little wastage. The Minister with responsibility for the APUA receives our nation's applause for the foresight and leadership which he has provided.

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:

(FRONT-LINE WORKERS, THE ENVIRONMENT, MULTILATERALISM, DIPLOMACY)

10. My Government takes this opportunity to express its thankfulness once again to the front-line workers who are involved in safeguarding the country and its people from the Coronavirus. The remarkable record of extremely low infections and single-digit active cases for many weeks, is not a fluke; it is not the result of luck, but of sound decision-making led by very capable professionals. The Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda, the Antigua and Barbuda Defense Force, the Central Board of Health, the Chief Medical Officer, the Nurses and Doctors, the Hospital Staff, the Emergency Medical Technicians, the Airport and Port Authority personnel, have worked as a team to keep our citizens and residents safe.

The nation conferred national honors on a representative group of front-line workers during Independence celebrations 2020, and upon our nation's Minister of Health for superb leadership. Congratulations once more, Minister!



(Highlight from International Nurses Day Celebration 2020.)

11. My Government banned plastic shopping bags, restricted Styrofoam food containers, reduced plastics in the environment, strengthened our environmental management laws, and contracted to make Barbuda a totally green-energy island.

The Customs and Excise Division has been a reliable partner, ensuring that these banned items are not allowed to land. My Government continues to aim at achieving the highest quality management of our country's environment, lowering greenhouse gas emissions, reducing the country's carbon footprint, and containing our island-country's vulnerability to storms and hurricanes.

12. In the fight against global climate change, Antigua and Barbuda has taken leadership roles at the United Nations, the Organization of American States and the Commonwealth of Nations. The U.N. Alliance of Small Island-States is being chaired by Antigua and Barbuda; and, within the Global Climate Fund and the SIRF Fund, the diplomats of Antigua and Barbuda have expanded their leadership roles. In London, our High Commissioner has placed our nation in the forefront of representation. In Washington, our country's determination to abide strictly to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of states, has won Antigua and Barbuda's Ambassador much applause. Our diplomatic corps has been described as "cricketizing diplomacy"; the Minister of Foreign Affairs will settle for nothing less than superior performance, hitting above our weight, from those who have been dispatched abroad to serve the small country's giant interests. Congratulations, Minister!

13. The nation's relation with our CARICOM regional neighbors is strong, despite a hiccup when LIAT took to the skies in December; that challenge was overcome by the persistence of the Antigua and Barbuda Prime Minister and his Cabinet. Failure is never an option! They declared. The management of the nation's diplomacy, whether practiced regionally or within hemispheric and global institutions, is focused upon measurable results. Adherence to principles grounded in regionalism is not ideological; that collaborative approach to problem-solving is pragmatic.

(BILATERAL RELATIONS)

14. While my Government will continue to strengthen the country's role in multilateral institutions, the decision-makers hold dear the bilateral relations enjoyed with several of our friendly partners.

i. **The People's Republic of China** has become our most important development partner, providing grants, expertise and loans that have contributed immeasurably to a more resilient Antigua and Barbuda. Students from Antigua and Barbuda have

been granted scholarships that have allowed scores of our youth to study in China, to learn the language, and to experience the complexity of the world's second largest economy, soon to be number one. My Government applauds China for its generosity and friendly relations.



ii.
(Prime Minister Gaston Browne and Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Antigua and Barbuda, His Excellency Mr. Sun Ang.)

iii. **The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela**—despite the unjust sanctions that have put a stranglehold on its economy, and unlawful meddling in its internal affairs—our friendly neighbour has nevertheless remained an abiding friend of the people of Antigua and Barbuda. The ALBA Bank, capitalized at a time when the economy of Venezuela was still vibrant, has been very helpful in responding to the LIAT crisis. Noting the constitutional change of administrations in the USA, taking place within days, it is my Government's hope that those unjust sanctions will be lifted.



(Prime Minister Gaston Browne meets with President of Venezuela, Nicolas Maduro Moros.)

iv. **The Republic of Cuba**, constrained by an embargo that dates back to 1962 which has been intensified over these past four years—and which has wrongfully, just days ago, been declared a state-sponsor of terrorism—was the first to respond to my Government when the global Covid-19 pandemic threatened to consume this nation’s human resources. A brigade of Cuban doctors and nurses, dispatched from Havana, has contributed immensely to mitigating the human-resource challenges spawned by the dreadful Coronavirus disease. My Government congratulates the Henry Reeves Brigade for its nomination for the highly-regarded Nobel Peace Prize 2021. This brave nation of Caribbean people has also opened its universities’ doors, allowing hundreds of youthful Antiguan and Barbudans to acquire professional training over the years, many choosing to become doctors, veterinarians, engineers, architects, computer scientists—achievements by very bright youth which may otherwise have been unattainable. Thank you Cuba!



V.
(Prime Minister Gaston Browne and Her Excellency Marie Fiffe Cabreja, Ambassador of the Republic of Cuba to Antigua and Barbuda.)

iv. **The United Kingdom, the United States and Canada** are traditional friends whose contributions to our national development, both prior to and since sovereignty, have been extraordinary. At a time when Antigua and Barbuda families sought refuge from an under-performing economy based on sugarcane, these three states served as a release valve, enabling emigrants to enter for work and study. Today, when my Government looks to these states, the primary focus is for foreign direct investment, for the opportunity afforded our youth for study, and for members of the diaspora to become investors--not lecturers.



(High Commissioner, H.E. Karen-Mae Hill and Lindsay Thompson, Resident British Commissioner to Antigua and Barbuda)

The United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada, though capital rich, have been severely impacted by Covid-19, suffering high unemployment and severe economic decline during this pandemic. The people of Antigua and Barbuda pray for the resuscitation of their workforce and their economies; the well-being of our own economy is very much determined by their performance.

The settlement of the W.T.O. judgment, the forgiveness of a fifty-year-old debt, the release from the Paris Club stranglehold, and the commencement of new relations with our giant neighbor to the north, are ambitions for which my Government works unceasingly.

vi. The European Union, the Commonwealth of Nations, the African Union, India, the United Arab Emirates, Japan, Australia, Morocco, Mexico, South Korea, Estonia and many other states have responded with generosity, especially following the passage of Hurricane Irma, and to the persistent drought that left our country parched and dry—up until November 9 and 10, 2020.

My Government remains appreciative of the development cooperation which has been forthcoming, persuaded that our foreign relations are intelligently guided.

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:

(AGRICULTURE, INFORMATION, PUBLIC WORKS, BARBUDA)

15. Before the global pandemic, food sovereignty and food security had been ambitions that were long embraced by my Government. The closure of borders was ominous in its threat to supply chains and markets—especially to a nation that imports more than 90% of all the food it consumes. Households, hotels, restaurants and food vendors all rely upon imported foodstuff to meet their needs and customer demands. Although my Government had been enticing households and young professionals to start backyard gardens and to experiment with aquaponics, the pandemic acted as a fillip to spur growing food as an alternative to several imports.



(A number of farmers received a variety of agricultural supplies such as fertilizers, seeds, drip irrigation lines and other inputs which assisted them in their production.)

My Government is pleased to report that agricultural output is beginning to rise, such that Antigua and Barbuda is self-sufficient in egg-production. More than \$100 million dollars are still spent annually on importing different meats.

The aim of the Ministry, ably led by a dynamic and youthful Minister, is to lessen our dependence on food imports significantly each year. It is my Government's intention to propel agriculture above the 3% of the economy that it now achieves, by doubling its output. In that regard, the People's Republic of China has lent us several specialists who are imparting new skills and techniques to a cadre of farmers.

The blue economy is also beginning to serve our interests, as the fisher-folk and entrepreneurs expand their ability to exploit our ocean's exclusive economic zone which is many times larger than our 170 square miles of land.

16. During these past near-seven years, my Government has been very forthcoming with the press—both local and international. During 2020, interviews of the Head of Government by CNN, Al Jazeera, CBS, BBC, the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the Boston Globe, the Huffington Post, and other international media, reflect the openness and transparency practiced by my Government. In fact,

the Prime Minister has been appointed Chairman of the Commonwealth Ministers of Finance—a great honor for Antigua and Barbuda.

Each Thursday morning, on the day following Cabinet meetings, the articulate and well-informed Minister of Information, provides a review of the most important decisions taken by the Cabinet, and answers the probing questions of the assembled journalists. This exercise is a remarkable example of the openness and transparency which characterize my Government from its very beginning. My Government applauds the national television station for the superb work it has successfully undertaken during the past year, and congratulates the Minister for this transformation. ABS-TV deserves our applause.

17. When my Government assumed office nearly seven years ago, there were so many government-owned buildings in disrepair that refurbishing them seemed too daunting a task. The leadership exhibited by the Minister of Works has made the task appear easy.



The former Ministry of Education building on Upper Church Street has been refurbished and turned into offices for the Central Board of Health, after laying idle for more than two decades. The old Margetson Ward at the Holberton Hospital has been redeemed and is now a 17-bed Infectious Disease Center, intended to cater to Covid-19 patients who are better-served at a designated facility; it is also equipped with sleeping quarters for nursing staff.



The old PDO Building on Valley Road has been refurbished and made into offices that before were unfit. The Police Headquarters on American Road, built in 1973, has never had its top floor completed; the Ministry of Works is achieving this task. The old Nurses Hostel on Queen Elizabeth Highway was fully refurbished under the Ministry's supervision in order to serve, first as a shelter and now as the Fiennes Institute; the rebuilding of Fiennes by the Public Works is likely to be completed this year. The NTTC Center on Nugent Avenue has been turned into a 75-bed hospital, awaiting furniture and some other paraphernalia. Repairs and expansions have been made to school plants, to the Clarevue Hospital and, the most spectacular, to the Old Administration Building at the foot of High Street. Refurbishment of the broken fence at Government House, and to the burnt-out Police Quarters there on Cross Street, have returned glory to the offices known as Government House. The General Post Office Building is still being refurbished, and

staff are assured that its many challenges are to be fully addressed.



(The IDC is equipped with 17 isolation rooms and 18 sleeping quarters for medics)

My Government's road rehabilitation program, supervised by the re-branded Public Works, is no longer in a temporary holding pattern because of the Covid-19 pandemic; the work has already started. The dynamic Minister of Works promised performance and he delivered.



(Work on Friars Hill Road.)

18. The orderly and secure management of the stock of vacant lands, owned by the Crown, will continue under the youthful and very well-organized Minister of Housing, Lands and Urban Development. The 1967 EC\$6 million-dollar purchase of the 33,000 acres of arable lands, from the Antigua Sugar Factory and the Syndicates Estates, triggered the most significant change in the circumstances of the people. That single act, by the Father of the Nation, spurred housing construction that has not yet retreated. More than 500 new houses and incomplete homes have been delivered to new homeowners, since 2014. My Government promises more new homes to come and thanks the National Housing, the CHAPA and the persistent Minister for responding effectively to an insatiable demand.

(Completed homes built by National Housing, Bay Street Villa.)



19. In Barbuda, 20 new homes have been delivered by my Government to needy Barbudan families, free of cost; they lost their homes in Hurricane Irma. And, scores of homes and the Hanna Thomas Hospital have been refurbished in Codrington with the partial assistance of international partners. The European Union plans to hand over 80 more homes to the Government of Antigua and Barbuda for the benefit of more of Barbuda's needy families. The People's Republic of China will

build another 100 hurricane-resilient homes on the edge of Codrington.



Housing Support to Barbuda
Under the Leadership of
The Government of Antigua and Barbuda

Funded by the European Union



Building Back Better
Antigua & Barbuda

Implemented by UNDP



Pictured Below: Beneficiary: Akuwaah Benjamin. Level 4. Before & After



Pictured Below: Beneficiary: Brad Frank De Souza. Level 4. Before & After



An outstanding Barbudan architect has designed a new town for Barbuda that will be powered by green energy, and placed on a higher plane to avoid flooding during storms and hurricanes.

The PLH project (Peace Love and Happiness) is moving forward, employing in excess of 200 workers—more than 50% of whom are youthful Barbudans. Our sister-isle is to become a net contributor to the Antigua and Barbuda economy in the near future, relieving the Barbuda Council of complete dependence on the Treasury.

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:

(SPORTS, EDUCATION, THE DISABLED, CREATIVE INDUSTRIES, LAW-MAKING)

20. It was indeed a very sad moment for many in Antigua and Barbuda when competitive sporting activity was forcibly brought to an end by the strictures flowing from the Covid-19 pandemic, here and abroad. Our favourite sports, including the 2020 Olympics, could not proceed because of the dreaded disease and the impossibility of social distancing during competition.

Slowly, these activities are returning. Competitive cricket, at the local, regional and international levels will begin this month in Antigua. A bubble will be established, limiting the players' and coaches' contacts with the outside world, except through the news media. The Sir Vivian Richards Stadium and the Coolidge Cricket Field will become active venues for competition. The Minister with responsibility for Sports would not relent until the Cabinet was persuaded; he has shown superb leadership, courage and grit, and is to be congratulated.

21. My Government has invested more in providing education to youth than any previous administration, in any seven-year period. Despite the freeze on hiring announced by my Government, the Cabinet authorized the employment of 50 new teachers; they will be deployed throughout the school system, filling gaps that need to be replenished even at great sacrifice.

The U.W.I. Fourth Landed Campus is an investment in the youth of Antigua and Barbuda and the O.E.C.S. that demonstrates commitment to excellence and to ensuring easier access to training and new knowledge—at the tertiary level. History will recall that primary and secondary education for all, was an ambition which the 39ers deemed fitting when so many of our forebears were illiterate. My Government accepts that the 76ers introduced the Antigua State College and the Antigua and Barbuda International Institute of Technology, in order to strengthen capacity.



(Six women make history as first graduands of The UWI Five Islands Campus.)

The Antigua and Barbuda Hospitality Training Institute is another of those institutions that prepares a cadre of post-secondary students for leadership in the most important tourism sector. The UWI Open Campus was another. Building on these foundations, the Fourth Landed Campus at Five Islands is a continuum in this ambition to be prepared for an unknowable future. The former Minister of Education Science and Technology did an awesome job preparing our youth. He is to be applauded.

The postponement of the CARIFTA Festival, the cancellation of Carnival 2020, and the suspension of so many concerts—including the Annual One-Nation Concert--were the result of Covid-19 and our knowledge of crowding and infections. The festivals will be back. Civilization has been temporarily derailed, but not for very long. My Government will act to restart these festivals and concerts as soon as it is safe for large gatherings to take place.

22. My Government has also intensified its efforts to ensure that the differently-abled, the indigent and the elderly are forever before us, in thought, word and deed. During this pandemic, much has been done to ensure that no-one goes hungry by providing food packages regularly; by the distribution of vouchers to challenged families; by ensuring that landlords do not evict those tenants who have

lost their jobs and are unable to pay; by asking the banks to halt foreclosures for those who suddenly find themselves without an income to pay mortgages; by ordering APUA to forego disconnections until such time as its customers are able to pay—even small amounts. The social safety net was enlarged in order to ensure a humane response. Both Ministers who have held responsibility for Social Transformation, in the year 2020, are to be congratulated for their energy and their management of this crisis.



(Beneficiaries of the food voucher program have the option to redeem vouchers for goods at a variety of vendors in Antigua.)

23. Despite a freeze on new hiring, my Government allowed the Ministry of Legal Affairs to bring on board a few new lawyers; though their responsibilities vary, the primary focus is to draft new and amended legislation. This Parliament has, as a consequence, met each month, sometimes more than once in a month, in order to present new and amended legislation that benefits the times.

It was with professional alacrity that the bankruptcy law in Antigua and Barbuda was amended in order to allow for an alternative to liquidation; the swift action by the Ministry of Legal Affairs helped to save LIAT from extinction.

Amendments to the Landlord and Tenant Act will bring greater equity to the relationship and confer wider discretion on judges.

The amendment to the Passport and Citizenship Act will make it easier for the Department of Immigration to exercise greater flexibility, such that returning to Parliament periodically to grant amnesty is to be made somewhat unnecessary.

Amendments to the nation's Anti-Money Laundering and Anti-Terrorism Financing legislation is literally included at every sitting, keeping Antigua and Barbuda off the O.E.C.D.'s gray list. This is very important to preserving the correspondent relations which banks here have with their counterparts in Europe, the USA and Canada.

My Government's Treaty-making and ratification capability is also enhanced by the expansive services offered by the Ministry of Legal Affairs.

A packed agenda of new legislation will face the Parliament in 2021. New legislation governing public health facilities will be introduced to set standards for nursing homes, clinics and private hospitals. The National Health Insurance, to be introduced in 2021, will require new legislation. A new Fire and Building Code is to be introduced to govern the erection of new buildings. The full implementation of the Criminal Prosecution Service will be completed this year; and, amendments will be forthcoming to the Vehicles and Road Traffic Act in an effort to make our highways safer. Amendments will be made to the Antigua and Barbuda Labour Code, and to the nation's Maritime Law.

It is also my Government's intention to enact new legislation to protect the children, young girls, boys, and women in danger of domestic violence.

The leadership demonstrated by the Attorney General/Minister of Legal Affairs is remarkable.

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:

(TOURISM)

24. It is cliché to proclaim **tourism** to be "our most important economic sector." Since August 1952, when the first *Hotels Aid Ordinance law* was passed by the Parliament; and, since 1972, when sugar-production collapsed and 300 years of economic history ended, tourism has become our nation's lifeblood.

All Caribbean countries have benefited greatly from this economic sector, and no place else on earth is known better for its natural beauty and charm than this archipelago of islands known as the Caribbean. That has been our doing, with help from our global partners.

25. The Antigua and Barbuda Governments, over the years, invested billions of dollars to make this product viable. Three new airport terminals, lengthened runways, expanded ports and a Deepwater Harbour, electricity and water desalination plants going back to 1968; modernized telephone and broadband services, paved roads and enhanced infrastructure to ensure access, were costly investments; training and development of the human-resource capabilities, in order to ensure service excellence; the waiver of many taxes as investment incentives, are all our doing. No-one ever imagined that all of these investments could be derailed by an invisible virus. It was inconceivable.

Precisely for these reasons, my Government's view of our economic history is that "leadership matters". Whatever the challenge facing a nation, superb leadership will result in better outcomes than poor leadership. No reasonable person ever imagined that the nation which landed a man on the moon could find itself trailing behind other large states in the battle against this virus.

Tourism in Antigua and Barbuda is very much determined by extant conditions in the source markets that drive this dependable and ever-expanding sector; and, it is also driven by good leadership here. All of Antigua and Barbuda prays for a rapid recovery in the USA, Europe and Canada.

While my Government seeks to diversify the tourism product, including new reliance upon the digital nomad sub-sector, the air b-n-b hospitality sub-sector, the health and stem-cell invitations, and other specialties, yet, the nation's bread and butter are earned in the luxury hotels where more than 5,000 men and women are employed. Along with the beaches, the climate and the warmth of our people, the hotels are our nation's gold mines.

Tourism will rebound but it cannot and will not ever be allowed to evolve into an extractive industry—not under my Government's watch.

The Minister of Tourism is to be applauded for bringing exceptional leadership to this industry, having been declared by an outstanding publication to be "the best Caribbean Tourism Minister in 2020".

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:

(CONCLUSION)

26. A New Year always signals new possibilities. The division of time into calendar years is civilization's method for measuring the passage of the ages. My Government has measured its performance over these past seven years (almost), and believes that the people of Antigua and Barbuda find its achievements outstanding. The two major sources of government's revenue have performed extremely well during this Pandemic. The Customs and Excise Division and the Inland Revenue Department have drilled down hard to extricate funds that are rightfully the Treasury's. Their leaders and their teams are to be congratulated.

27. My Government operates on the basis that the promises it makes ought to be fulfilled. It is encapsulated in the frequent pronouncement: "Promise made, Promise kept". The track record over these past seven years is marked by fulfilled promises made to the Antigua and Barbuda electorate.

28. No-one could have predicted the Covid-19 global pandemic 2020; but, the leadership in Antigua and Barbuda, throughout this 10-month experience, has been superb. My Government is aware that the crisis is not yet at an end, but the light at the end of the tunnel is shining through and recovery by the fourth quarter of 2021 is within reach. Antigua and Barbuda is poised to achieve outstandingly when the Covid-19 pandemic retreats. The nation's leadership has crafted the blueprint for this rebirth, readying itself for the next crisis that is sure to strike. Experienced leadership with a track record worthy of applause is superior to any other. May the God of our forebears who provided this nation with outstanding leaders in the Parliament, in the Cabinet, in the constituencies, continue to provide wisdom to the people of this beautiful little country, in the months ahead.

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:

29. Lady Williams and I wish all of us a healthy and prosperous New Year. God bless you. I thank you.