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**Governor-General of Antigua and Barbuda**

**Delivers the 2023 Speech from the Throne**

**MANAGING WITH A SMALLER TEAM:**

**A more nimble and responsive government**

Monday, February 20, 2023  
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:**

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Lady Williams and I wish our fellow citizens and residents alike a healthy, safe, and prosperous New Year.

1. Although we are in the second month of 2023, the start of a new Parliamentary year conveys a freshness that is reflected in the altered make-up of the House of Representatives, following the free and fair January 18<sup>th</sup> general elections.
2. I therefore congratulate the Prime Minister and his eight candidates for securing the majority support of the electors who voted in nine constituencies. Congratulations are also extended to the Leader of the Opposition and his colleague candidates who collectively won electoral majorities in six constituencies. My congratulations go out to the Member from Barbuda who won a majority on our sister-isle; and congratulations to the Independent Candidate from St. Peter who secured a majority in that constituency.
3. I also wish to congratulate Madam President of the Senate on her reappointment as President of the Senate and Mr. Speaker on his re-election to the House of Representatives. A special welcome is extended to the returning and newly appointed Senators.
4. The will of the people of Antigua and Barbuda has been clearly expressed through the configuration of the Parliament. The weight of the responsibility has now been placed on the shoulders of the 17 elected members of the House of Representatives to serve our citizens with integrity, impartiality and dedication. May the actions of our parliamentarians be guided by the common good of all people, both in rural and urban areas, across all generations and demographics as we all seek to do our utmost for the betterment of Antigua and Barbuda.

5. Cognizant of the people's wishes and with a renewed commitment to provide the highest level of service to our people, my Government's Cabinet has been constituted to maximize the reality of a diminished majority, with the declared promise of a more nimble and responsive administration.

**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:**

**EDUCATION – A KEY PILLAR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT**

6. My government's vision is to leverage education as a powerful tool for driving economic growth and development that benefits all our citizens, particularly our youth. We recognize that education is the foundation for a prosperous and equitable society, and we are committed to providing access to quality education and training programmes that equip our people with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in the global marketplace. Through strategic investments in education, we aim to create a workforce that is well-prepared to take on the challenges and opportunities of the future, and to position our country as a leader in innovation and progress. Our goal is to create a brighter future for all Antiguans and Barbudans, and we are dedicated to realizing this vision through collaboration, innovation, and a strong commitment to excellence in education.
7. It is in this context that I am proud to share that our government has, through its partners, made a significant investment of EC\$216 million towards building and expanding the University of the West Indies Campus at Five Islands. This investment will ensure that the UWI Campus in Antigua and Barbuda can offer enhanced academic programmes and services to our nation, the region and beyond. The primary objective of the Five Islands Campus is to expand the information technology curriculum to include artificial intelligence and robotics, which will equip our graduates with the skills to create a hub of innovation, akin to Silicon Valley. As a highly ranked university among the world's best, the UWI is poised to continue its success with the help of this investment.

8. My Government is also pleased to announce that it has secured \$13 million to expand the Antigua and Barbuda Institute of Continuing Education (ABICE) and has received over \$4 million in grants and gifts towards the expansion of the Sir Novelle Richards Academy. These investments are the result of the skillful negotiations by the Honourable Prime Minister and the Minister of Education who are to be commended for their unwavering commitment to enhancing the education services provided. These investments will ensure that more of our citizens and residents have access to quality technical and vocational as well as secondary education and training programmes, and will help us build a stronger, more resilient economy for the future. All citizens and residents are therefore called upon to take full advantage of the range of learning opportunities which my government has provided.
9. In addition to these worthwhile developments, my government is committed to promoting the performing arts in our country. To this end, the responsible ministry will be focusing its efforts on establishing a National Performing Arts Centre by converting the former Deluxe Cinema building into one which suits its new purpose. This new centre will provide a platform for aspiring artists to showcase their talents and hone their skills, while also offering high-quality entertainment for visitors and residents alike.
10. With these new initiatives, my government is confident that our country's educational and cultural output will continue to grow and flourish under the leadership of the Minister with responsibility for Education, Sports and the Creative Industries. I invite you to join me in applauding the policymakers and professionals who have led the remarkable achievements in these sectors for the period under review. My government remains dedicated to creating a brighter future for all Antiguan and Barbudans through smart investments in these sectors.

**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:**

**HEALTH – A KEY PILLAR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT**

11. Most will agree that increasing one's learning will very likely result in an increase in earnings. Similarly, the assertion that "A healthy nation is a wealthy nation" highlights the importance of good health for economic development. When people are healthy, they are able to work and be productive, which inevitably lead to economic growth and prosperity.
12. Although my government recognizes the importance of preventative healthcare as the best approach to achieve wellness and ultimately wealth, we also acknowledge the pressing need for a robust restorative healthcare system. It is unfortunate that a growing number of our adult and juvenile citizens suffer from lifestyle diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, and cardiovascular conditions that can lead to organ failure and early death. However, these illnesses can be prevented or cured through healthy diets, exercise, and regular check-ups by healthcare providers. To address this issue, a significant portion of the health budget will be allocated towards reducing the harmful effects of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) that afflict our men, women, and children. We believe that the health of our nation is equally, if not more, valuable than education and will remain a top priority for my government.
13. With this principle in mind, my government has responded to the rising cases of kidney failure, especially among our elderly population, by starting construction of a new Renal Centre on the premises of the former Holberton Hospital. This centre will significantly improve our local capacity to provide life-saving dialysis treatment and kidney transplants. While kidney transplants are a better option, there is a shortage of donors which makes it necessary to rely on dialysis. To tackle this issue, the government intends to initiate campaigns to encourage organ donation with special protection for donors, including model legislation which protects donors from discrimination by insurance companies, banks and other financial institutions. It is noteworthy that the Sir Lester Bird Medical Centre has once again demonstrated its capacity to provide quality renal healthcare, as exemplified by the recently successful kidney transplant surgeries which were conducted two weeks ago.
14. When the new Renal Center is fully operational, my government will turn the erstwhile space at the Sir Lester Bird Medical Center into a Cardiac facility.

Operations to repair the functioning of the heart, that now require a trip abroad, will be conducted right here in Antigua and Barbuda. We must all remain aware that we can often avoid the loss of our parents, grandparents, and loved-ones from complications of lifestyle diseases through education and prevention. Let us all make full use of the resources available to us.

15. Our nation's successful response to the Covid-19 pandemic was not an accident. My government wisely implemented policies to curb and curtail the impact of this dreadful disease. These policies which included social distancing, mask wearing, hand washing, and vaccination, have for all intents and purposes, resulted in the elimination of the restrictions which were instituted. Crowds can now freely gather at cultural events, congregations have returned to church buildings; citizens can now attend parliament en masse; gatherings can now assemble for social functions; and family outings can be held without fear of spreading the disease to loved ones, as was common. Nearly two-thirds of our nation's eligible population has been vaccinated. Vaccinations have served our people well. My government believes that the price paid during the pandemic, to achieve these freedoms, was well worth it. Fellow citizens and residents, we should not and must not drop our guard. Let us all continue to practice good health protocols and focus on preventative care as much as we can.
16. My government acknowledges that certain circumstances can act as obstacles. One such hindrance is poverty which is often a barrier to accessing two keys for economic success, namely quality education and healthcare. The Ministry responsible for social transformation, led by experienced and competent policy makers and professionals, has been and will continue to actively work to address the negative effects of poverty. While eliminating this barrier entirely may not be achievable, the government is committed to continuing its efforts to alleviate its harmful impacts and to end inter-generational poverty.
17. During the period under review, my government's poverty alleviation measures included the distribution of millions of dollars in food vouchers, the improvement of housing for the vulnerable through the Home Advancement Program for the Indigent (HAPI) led by a self-driven philanthropist, the commissioning of the Social Protection Board which

replaced a less responsive Board of Guardians system. These measures have prevented our country from experiencing the stark divide between the rich and poor that exists in many other places. Through the reduction of this divide, my government is making educational opportunities possible for all, from the cradle to the grave. Access to modern means of learning must be supported by full employment, equitable distribution of wealth, and equal opportunities for all to ensure justice. These principles guide my government's actions in addressing poverty and its effects on access to education, healthcare and employment.

18. My government commends the healthcare and social protection policy makers and professionals who have driven our healthcare and social protection accomplishments in the period under review. My government continues to give the assurance that the necessary steps will be taken to ensure that professionals receive the support and resources necessary, such as funding and training to continue this important work. My government expresses its thanks to the Minister with responsibility for Health, Wellness, Social Transformation and the Environment.

**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:**

**ESSENTIAL PUBLIC SERVICES TO SUPPORT ECONOMIC GROWTH**

19. My government considers access to housing and services such as potable water, electricity, telephony, internet connectivity, road systems, waste management, and environmental safety, as essential public services which are fundamental to the health, safety, and well-being of its citizens and residents. These services are also considered to be essential components, with education and health, in any system designed for economic growth and development.
20. My government has realized the importance of achieving certain ministerial synergies within its Cabinet to accomplish its goals in these areas. One example is the combination of the portfolios of Housing and Works under one ministerial leadership to achieve greater harmonization between

modern approaches to housing construction and public infrastructure, such as road and underground provisioning for public utilities. During the review period under consideration, my government, through its ministry of housing, oversaw the construction of more new homes than any other period in recent times. This was achieved utilizing the Central Housing and Planning Authority (CHAPA) and the National Housing and Urban Renewal Corporation. The improvements made in our nation's housing stock and major highways reflect my government's continued commitment to the provision of essential public services that promote growth. The progress made to date is to be applauded. My government has given the assurance that under its new cabinet, every effort will be made to deploy the resources of the Ministry of Works in a more efficient and effective manner to achieve maximum results. My government has already embarked on the task of procuring key aggregates such as cement, steel and sand to address urgent repairs needed for community roads.

21. The "Land-For-Youth" programme, which was reactivated after 2014, has gained momentum as new plots are being set aside for young people. This programme offers many young people the opportunity to have their dream homes built on their own plots of land. However, the number of applications for the initiative has already exceeded the available plots, which suggests that the era of multi-storied homes is fast approaching. In response to limited space, increasing demand, and the need for a high quality of climate resilient homes, a new approach is required, which will be exemplified by the Booby Alley Housing Project. This project is set to commence construction soon and will showcase the future of housing development.

22. My government is aware of the adverse effects caused by the persistent drought that has impacted our nation over the years and has renewed its commitment to improving the availability of potable water to our citizens. Average rainfall has plummeted from 39 inches per year, to less than 19 inches on average in the last three years, except for the 21 inches which fell on November 8 and 9, 2020. Under normal conditions, a 40% to 60% ratio of stored water from dams, reservoirs and aquifers, is added to water produced by the reverse osmosis plants to supply our homes, hotels, businesses and institutions. Drought has triggered the exhaustion of those stored supplies. The scarcity of rainfall, considered to be the worst in the last century,



coupled with the depletion of water supplies in naturally-occurring freshwater stores has made the use of reverse osmosis water production essential.

23. To address this issue, our government intends to meet the required production levels through several means including improvements to the R/O plants, the timely repair of damaged valves, leaky mains, the installation of pumps at well placed intervals in elevated areas so that there can be a more equitable distribution of this precious commodity to all consumers.
24. More than 7 million gallons of potable water are currently produced daily, and another reverse osmosis plant producing 3.5 million gallons daily is to be added at Bethesda in short order.
25. The global warming phenomenon is responsible for the lowered rainfall and the increasing storms which continue to batter our Caribbean from June to November annually. Antigua and Barbuda's diplomats have sought to change the profligate habits of states that are utilizing our skies as a dumping ground for billions of tons of unwanted gases and particulate matter, shifting the rainfall patterns around the globe.
26. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is intended to change global behaviour by utilizing "the polluter pays" principle. Success is close. There is near-agreement on "loss and damage", which gets vulnerable nations closer to the global objective of better energy-production systems, lowered pollution, and saving civilization from destroying itself. The installation of an LNG Electricity Producing Plant at the Crabbes Peninsula signals my government's determination to lower pollution and reduce Antigua and Barbuda's greenhouse gas footprint. The Prime Minister, in his capacity as Chairman of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), along with the Minister of the Environment, the Delegation to the United Nations, and the Department of the Environment, have been working tirelessly to preserve our fair land and sea so that our citizens and residents can enjoy a livable future in a space with minimal negative environmental impact.
27. My government is committed to providing affordable and reliable broadband services throughout our twin-island state. The commissioning of

an undersea cable owned by the APUA will result in a decrease in service costs, prevent the charging of exorbitant prices for rental connectivity, provide Barbuda with better quality broadband services and advance our goal of achieving First World standards of connectivity throughout the nation.

28. My government is optimistic about the future and is fully committed to addressing the existential challenge of water scarcity, the impact of climate change and the demands for integrating technology and innovation into everyday life. The Honourable Cabinet Member with responsibilities for Housing, Works, Lands and Urban Renewal and her colleague Honourable Minister for Information Communication Technologies, Utilities and Energy respectively, have renewed their commitment to serve. They will leverage their leadership skills, engage with experts and key stakeholders to deliver the essential public services, which will in turn strengthen the foundation on which our nation's economic development will continue to be built.

**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:**

**LAW, ORDER, AND IMMIGRATION – ENSURING A SAFE AND SECURE SPACE FOR CITIZENS AND RESIDENTS AS WELL AS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

29. Over the past five years, my government has introduced new and amended legislation through the Office of the Attorney General, resulting in significant improvements in our legal system. The Ministry of Legal Affairs, in particular, has been highly productive, thanks to the additional lawyers with drafting expertise who were added to its roster. Our courts have become more efficient with the establishment of a special Family Court, a Sexual Offences Court, and an Industrial Court, earning special commendation from the Chief Justice for leading the way.

30. In the new parliamentary period, my government will prioritize updating outdated laws concerning prisons, the police force, and other law enforcement agencies. My government's main focus will be on establishing a rehabilitation program and other beneficial and intellectual processes, so

that inmates leaving correctional institutions can become productive citizens of Antigua and Barbuda.

31. My government will also introduce legislation to improve the care of the elderly, with a particular emphasis on elderly care institutions. My government's goal is to ensure that the residents in these facilities receive the highest quality care in accordance with international standards set by the WHO. In addition, my government plans to introduce laws that provide greater support for single-parent families in our legislative agenda.
32. Antigua and Barbuda is a melting pot of cultures, with a significant number of our adult population comprising citizens from other countries. This diversity, made possible by a flexible but responsible immigration policy, has been a key factor in our country's progress and exceptional economic growth since 1976. A new source of visitors, just two months ago, has been from the hitherto untapped West African countries. While it was my government's initial understanding that our West African brothers and sisters were visiting as tourists, it has now become apparent that some of these visitors may be seeking asylum in the Caribbean, including Antigua and Barbuda.
33. My Government notes with interest the decision of the High Court of Trinidad and Tobago, less than a week ago, to prevent the Trinidad and Tobago Government from deporting the West Africans back to their homeland. My government further notes that the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) played a significant role in stopping the deportations. My Government is required to take this High Court decision into consideration, and to the role of the UNHCR, prior to making its final decision. My Government has a history of demonstrating its care for—and concern over—the more vulnerable, defenseless, and persecuted. My government is committed to protecting all residents from exploitation and harsh treatment and would never have our West African brothers and sisters dwell illegally in the shadows; nor would we allow our kith and kin to be subjected to exploitation and harsh treatment by those who may seek to create victims. My Government has extended amnesty four times over the past eight years to immigrants who failed to maintain lawful status, and no foreign national, except for criminals, should fear deportation.

34. The Attorney General, a highly capable and experienced legal professional, is leading efforts to find a reasonable solution to this complex challenge. The ministerial mandate given to this key member of the Cabinet, the Attorney General, covers the important areas of legal affairs, public safety, immigration and labour, all of which determine the state of our homeland and border security, the welfare and productivity of our workforce and the status of our visitors and residents who choose to make our nation their home. Few would disagree with the submission that these factors also contribute to a nation's economic development. My Government therefore applauds all policy makers and professionals who have been serving in these areas.

**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:**

**NURTURING FOREIGN POLICY TO SUPPORT NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

35. Nurturing a foreign policy that supports national development requires a comprehensive and strategic approach. It involves establishing and maintaining relationships with other countries based on mutual interests, cooperation, and respect. This is why my government through its ministry of Foreign Affairs has a full grasp of the fundamental principles upon which it conducts its bilateral and multilateral foreign relations. Antigua and Barbuda aims to be a friend to many and an enemy to none. My Government respects the sovereign equality of states, does not interfere in their internal affairs, and adheres to the principles outlined in the United Nations Charter of 1945.

36. Our strong 40-year-long relationship with the People's Republic of China remains undiminished, yielding mutual benefits. The Belt and Road Initiative has strengthened the friendship and created new opportunities. The modern airport and seaport projects are successful examples of the Antigua and Barbuda-China partnership.

37. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has been a true friend, and we have reciprocated. Our partnership through the ALBA Bank, PDV-CARIBE, the Eye

Care Initiative, and other programmes have been mutually beneficial. My Government respects Venezuela's decision to manage its own internal affairs, as we do with all countries in the region.

38. The Government of the Republic of Cuba has been generous to our youth, strengthened our healthcare system, and provided electrical and roadworks engineers, benefiting all.
39. The Dominican Republic has offered to strengthen our education system, and we have accepted. Many Dominican nationals have made Antigua and Barbuda their home, strengthening relations between our countries.
40. The Republic of India was responsive during the Covid Pandemic and continues to offer scholarships and training to our civil servants. We recognize India's historical contributions to the anti-colonial movement, bringing the issue of apartheid in South Africa to the UN, and achieving republic status in 1950. Long live India!
41. Our relationship with the United States is strong, driven by growing tourism links and trade surpluses, resulting in collaboration, shared security concerns and improved security building mechanisms. We hope to see the return of a US Embassy to Antigua and Barbuda, serving the Northern Leeward Islands, as soon as possible.
42. Our relations with the United Kingdom continue to be crucial, as they have been since we achieved sovereignty in 1981. The UK remains interested in our nation's development and has never relented in its efforts to right the history of our two states. The UK provides a significant portion of our tourism market, and cricket test matches attract thousands to our shores. Caribbean Governments are relying on the UK's support at the E.U. level for our Citizenship by Investment Programmes that generate significant revenue for their Treasuries.
43. The Minister of Foreign Affairs has been nurturing strong bilateral and multilateral relations with the help of our talented Ambassadors, and we are grateful for his unrelenting commitment to excellence.

44. The Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) remains one of the principal organs that safeguard and defend the integrity of the State of Antigua and Barbuda. The Eastern Caribbean Central Bank (ECCB), formed within the OECS framework, demonstrates our ability to submerge our sovereignty and construct a "regional state" that enhances our sub-region's viability. The East Caribbean Supreme Court has made justice affordable and accessible to our nationals. The Regional Security System (RSS) allows the OECS and Barbados to pool our security apparatus, multiplying our defence capabilities. My Government works with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Organization of American States (OAS), the Commonwealth of Nations, and the United Nations to provide a calculated approach towards achieving sustainable development and securing justice at home and abroad.

**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:**

45. My government recognizes that achieving food security is crucial for sustainable development. While traditional open-field farming is important, this system alone cannot guarantee high agricultural output in the face of challenges such as drought and pests, which can spoil soil and affect the quality of crop and livestock production. To address these challenges, my government is exploring innovative solutions such as drip irrigation to limit wastage of water and prevent weeds from overtaking produce. My Government is also exploring new methods such as hydroponics to increase domestic food production and possibly export in the future. In the meantime, my government is committed to preserving remaining agricultural land, which has been rightfully converted for other uses since 1967.

46. My government, through its Minister appointed with the portfolio of Foreign Affairs, Agriculture, Trade and Barbuda affairs has recommitted his focus on nurturing a foreign policy which identifies national development priorities, promotes trade and investment, participates in international organizations, strengthens diplomatic relations, supports regional integration and protects our nutritional security.

**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:**

OUR NATION'S FISCAL POSITION AND THE RE-GROWTH OF OUR KEY INDUSTRY

47. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine resulted in a global rise in food and energy prices, affecting Antigua and Barbuda as well. Unfortunately, some of our citizens were of the view that my government was responsible for maintaining stable prices during the crisis. However, it is essential to understand that the price increases were beyond the control of any government, as both large and small economies across the world experienced the same issue. Unfortunately, those who are among the world's poorest bore the brunt of the crisis. In response to this reality, my government has adopted a two-pronged approach to address this challenge.
48. In one approach, my government has sought to respond to the rising prices of food and energy caused by the war between Russia and Ukraine. Recognizing the impact of this crisis on the people, our Ministry of Finance, under the leadership of an experienced and very determined Prime Minister, took decisive action with the full support of the Cabinet to adjust various tax mechanisms. As a result, millions of dollars in taxes on fuel were waived to alleviate the burden caused by volatile oil prices, while adding numerous zero-rated products to the existing list. The \$10-barrel programme, which allowed families to import essential items such as toiletries and food items free of taxes, was extended beyond Christmas 2020.
49. Despite the challenges brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, my government ensured that public servants received their salaries and wages on time, and that pensioners received their full payments. This dedication to the people has paid off, as evidenced by the growth in the economy in 2021 and continuing that trend into 2022. In fact, my Government anticipates exceeding the average 7% growth in 2023. One of the major contributors to this success has been the PLH project in Barbuda, which not only created jobs but also stimulated local purchases, throughout the pandemic. Despite attempts to shut down this economic engine, my government firmly believes

that Barbuda will continue to be a source of jobs and opportunities for growth in 2023 and beyond.

50. The second prong of our national fiscal security mechanism was focused on preserving our nation's main economic engine - the tourism sector. My government acknowledges the hard work of the Minister of Tourism and his team of public and private sector partners for growing, stabilizing and rebuilding the sector—an accomplishment which received several awards including the Tourism Minister of the Year Award presented by the Caribbean Tourism Organization. The recovery of the tourism sector after its forced lockdown during the dark period of the COVID 19 pandemic is a remarkable achievement, engineered by my government's efforts and the superb leadership of a team of experts who capitalized on pent-up demand for travel in the markets that drive our tourism industry. Despite the temporary closure of two of our largest properties—Jolly Beach and the Halcyon Cove—undergoing upgrades and renewal, visitor arrival figures nearly match those of 2019, our best year on record. Furthermore, we expect even more visitors in the upcoming season.

51. My government remains steadfast in its efforts to preserve LIAT and ensure that the aviation sector, which Antigua and Barbuda has developed over the course of several decades, continues to be an export service. My Government views the survival of this critical sector as a means to drive the growth of our OECS economy. Our commitment to regional travel will not falter, and we will continue our work towards sustaining this vital service. The Minister of Tourism, Civil Aviation, Transportation and Investment is re-committed to leading his team in embracing a larger portfolio while delivering just as good or better service.

**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:**

**BUILDING ON THE LESSONS OF OUR PAST TO BUILD A RESILIENT FISCAL SPACE**



52. My government acknowledges that it cannot predict when or if another crisis will strike and affect its plans and programmes. To prepare for any such eventuality, my government is committed to building resilience and sustainability into all of its future endeavours; the object is to ensure it can bounce back after each crisis. Creating jobs and economic opportunities that lead to success is the priority for most elected governments. The historic reason for creating Antigua and Barbuda was wealth generation; but, for 300 years, the exclusive domain of absentee owners monopolized the three factors of wealth creation - land, labour, and capital.
53. In 1939, the people of Antigua and Barbuda created the first trade union, which broke the monopoly on labour, and allowed their parents and grandparents to demand higher wages. In 1967, the people of Antigua and Barbuda claimed ownership of 33,000 acres of arable land by purchasing the Syndicates Land and Sugar Estates for less than EC\$6 million. The evidence shows that the most has been made of that purchase. A year ago, in 2022, foreign banks decided to abandon the Antigua and Barbuda markets because they deemed the profits too small to justify the investments. However, locally owned banks were empowered to purchase the assets, making them the masters of capital.
54. It is reasonable to conclude that Antiguan and Barbudans now have control over land, labour, and capital to some extent. The days of absentee owners, 5,000 miles away in foreign lands, are over. Reginald Stevens, the first President of the AT&LU, kick-started the successful effort to own labour, while Sir Vere Cornwall Bird is credited with national ownership of the land. The current Prime Minister, aiming to create a new economic model, fought to ensure the national ownership of foreign banks that controlled capital, making them ours. The means of production - land, labour, and capital - are now in the hands of our people, and wealth-creation possibilities have shifted to the once-underprivileged who are now full of courage and not fear. Productivity, as Sir Vere Bird reminded us on 1st November 1981, is the *sine qua non* of success. Hard work and paying attention to the needs of the neediest are continually required. My government pledges to work hard and introduce smart strategies over the next term of its existence, for the benefit of all the people, regardless of political persuasion.

**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:**

CELEBRATING LONGEVITY IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

My government acknowledges the contributions made by our citizens and residents and no less those who serve in the House of Representatives with an extended tenure as determined by the people who have repeatedly elected them to office. My government therefore joins in extending special congratulations to the Honourable Sir Robin Yearwood for his successful re-election to the House for 10 unbroken occasions which, all being well in 2026, will culminate in half a century of representing the St. Phillip North constituency. My government recognizes that this outstanding feat, which is rare among politicians in the 54-member Commonwealth of Nations, deserves to be chronicled for future generations to learn from. Therefore, my government is determined to commission an official autobiography of Sir Robin Yearwood, with the expectation that it will be completed by February 2026.

My Government also acknowledges the accomplishments of two other long-serving Parliamentarians in the persons of the Honourable Sir Molwyn Joseph, who entered the political arena in 1984, and the Honourable Steadroy Benjamin, who entered in 1994. Both parliamentarians have served their constituencies for almost 40 and 30 consecutive years, respectively. These parliamentarians have been able to connect with their electors, deliver tangible benefits to their constituencies, and work tirelessly on behalf of the nation. There is no doubt that the new members of Parliament can learn valuable lessons from these fully matriculated and experienced members of the House of Representatives.

**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:**

As previously acknowledged, this parliament is comprised of representatives from diverse persuasions. While this diversity may result in robust discourse as each representative delivers on behalf of the constituents they serve, it is crucial that all

members maintain a balance between being passionate and being civil, orderly, measured, and factual.

May I take this opportunity to encourage all parliamentarians to conduct themselves in a manner that respects the opinions and rights of others and adheres to the established rules and procedures of the parliament. By doing so, you will create a respectful and constructive atmosphere in the parliament, which is crucial for productive and meaningful discussions and debates.

Each member of this honourable house has a responsibility to promote constructive and meaningful dialogue, which can be achieved by using measured and factual language when presenting arguments and viewpoints. By using evidence-based information and facts to support your arguments, you can strengthen your credibility and win the support of others.

The nation of Antigua and Barbuda is expecting the best you can offer.

May God bless you. May God bless Antigua and Barbuda.

Thank you for listening.