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Governor-General of Antigua and Barbuda

Delivers the 2026 Speech from the Throne

**SOLID, STABLE, SOARING:
THE NEXT QUARTER CENTURY**

Thursday, 20 November 2025
Parliament Building
Queen Elizabeth Highway
St. John's, ANTIGUA and BARBUDA

GOOD MORNING, EVERYONE.

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:

Introduction

1. As the first quarter of the 21st Century comes to an end, in a few weeks, my Government expresses best wishes to the citizens and residents of Antigua and Barbuda for the second quarter of the 21st Century. Our island-state, despite setbacks, has experienced a quarter century of growth—**solid, stable and soaring!**
2. Twenty-five years ago, in the year 2000, our Gross Domestic Product (GDP)—the sum of all economic activity in the 12 month period—measured **\$802 million US Dollars**. The current GDP of Antigua and Barbuda, in 2025, exceeds **\$2 billion US Dollars**—a growth rate in excess of **300%** measuring the strides during the first 25 years of this century. That is a remarkable record for any country; and, it is especially outstanding for a small island developing state that has been battered by hurricanes, tropical storms, floods and droughts, a global pandemic and a global financial crisis in those same 25 years. Congratulations to the workers, and entrepreneurs, and the leaders of our country, over this past quarter century!
3. The people who live and work in Antigua and Barbuda are among the most prosperous and productive in the entire Caribbean, earning on average more than EC\$60,000 *per capita*, and positioned to increase that average even further in the immediate future. The United Nations has declared Antigua and Barbuda to be 53rd on the Human Development Index (**HDI**), remarkably ahead of every other Caribbean country.
4. My Government believes that our success in these past 25 years is a consequence of attracting significant capital or foreign direct investment (**FDI**). Growth in FDI is made possible by sound decision-making, by easy access to primary and secondary education, by providing skills-training and a second chance to those who wish to correct their earlier directions, by adopting fitting healthcare policies, by lifting the housing stock to a new level, and by enabling a university education to be achieved

without having to leave these shores. These factors, coupled with a low crime rate and political stability, have also molded the human-resource base required for continuous economic growth.

5. The availability of jobs, produced in abundance by the construction and hospitality industries and their spin-offs, has assured many youth of employment possibilities. By addressing the challenge of youth unemployment, many maladies are cured that otherwise would overrun civilization. My Government has also determined that the attainment of a university education—making access easier by planting the Five Islands Campus of the U.W.I. on our soil—reduces many pathologies among youth, turns our society into a powerful engine of opportunities, and contains anti-social behaviors that could result from high unemployment. That challenge is faced by all countries in our region. All Governments must find solutions or surrender to the inequity and chaos that result.

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:

OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENTS IN 25 YEARS PAST

7. While the governments preceding the current administration were faced with several challenges that they deemed too difficult to overcome, my Government, filled with daring and determination, pursued a bold and courageous approach to changing those circumstances that seemed politically defying.

Land Ownership on Barbuda

8. **Barbuda**, for example, remained a diamond in the rough for more than 60 years following the 1952 law which enabled tourism to take root in the economy. But, after 2014, my Government determined that Barbuda would become a net contributor to the Treasury of Antigua and Barbuda. Several new hospitality projects on Barbuda would eliminate unemployment and under-employment

there, within a very short period, and provide the Barbuda Council with millions of dollars in revenues. Never before, in the history of Barbuda and the creation of the Barbuda Council, had this ever occurred. P.L.H. and Rosewood, Louie Hill and Nobu, paved roadways and street lights, a new airport and a planned new seaport will have begun to transform Barbuda into net-contributor status.

9. Then, by repealing the 2007 legislation and replacing it with a just and fair law that would provide title to those who have dwelled on plots of land for generations, my Government ended that injustice which previous administrations feared to change. Despite the many challenges by a small corps of naysayers, the apex court of our country ruled that all land not privately owned in Antigua and Barbuda is the Crown's. Far from the folly which assured poverty and under-development for those who chose to live on Barbuda, my Government has brought prosperity and opportunity to those of our citizens and residents who live on the sister isle. A new International Burton-Nibbs Airport, to be followed by a new seaport capable of receiving container ships, new roads, new green energy plants, new freshwater-producing sources, and new housing stock in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma, have begun to make Barbuda shine like a diamond. We-the-people thank our Prime Minister, the former parliamentary representative and the caretaker candidate for pursuing this unrelenting vision of a better Barbuda.

Drought and Water Shortage

10. Ever since the arrival of Europeans and their enslaved Africans on these shores in 1632, Antigua has been plagued with **drought**. There were periods in our lifetime when cattle died of thirst; when the quadruped population decreased significantly because their wild-plant food did not rejuvenate, since rain did not fall; when food crops died in the field because no waters fell from the heavens and no stored water was available. As early as 1968, the Potworks Dam—capable of holding one billion gallons of fresh water—was constructed. In 1970, the first desalination plant was put into action, producing hundreds of thousands of gallons of potable water daily. These improvements were undertaken in order to meet the growing demand for water from our population, our tourism sector, and our farmers. As our population and our economy grew, these 1968 and 1970 measures proved inadequate.

11. In 2014, my Government pledged to improve significantly the water supply to homes, to hotels, to businesses and to farmers. The Minister of Public Utilities, handed the task of solving this historical shortfall in 2023, set out to increase the amount of potable water available throughout our island-country. The APUA has moved our fresh water production from 3.5 million gallons daily in 2014, to more than 11,000,000 gallons of desalinated water today.

A firm from the USA has been justly rewarded for their efforts, and APUA leadership has demonstrated its appreciation for the nation's water needs. Leadership matters, my Government has always asserted, and so the task of fixing this vexing challenge was handed to a very intelligent and experienced member of the Cabinet who has triumphed. Congratulations, Minister of APUA!

12. Storage and re-piping are yet to be completed. Ambassador Martinez from Cuba has arranged the loan of water engineers from Cuba; they have begun to tackle the storage disabilities, but are not yet finished. Our friends from the People's Republic of China have agreed to contribute to the re-piping challenge; and, we thank Ambassador Zhang of the People's Republic of China who has recently concluded her tour of duty in our beautiful country. Talent, friendship across many nations, leadership by our own technicians, determination by our Cabinet, and dismissal of those who failed to see the vision, have contributed to nearing a solution to historical water woes. Congratulations to all.

Ownership of Foreign Banks

13. When I was much younger, one riddle that would be asked by curious teenagers is: ***Why is High Street like a river?*** The answer: It has banks on both sides. Today, all of Antigua and Barbuda can justly ask: ***Why is High Street now more like a beach?*** The answer: *Because of the pleasure we derive from knowing that, like all our beaches, the banks on High Street's south-side are now all ours.* Despite those who argued publicly that my Government would be compelled to issue a vesting order to a foreign bank for the purchase of the assets of the Canadian banks that were voluntarily leaving, two local banks—ACB Caribbean and ECAB—now own the buildings and other assets that once were the property of foreign banks. That achievement, occurring within the last years of the last quarter Century, marks

Antigua and Barbuda as special—thanks to my Government’s Minister of Finance, the Attorney General, and the Cabinet.

Empowerment Capitalism

14. My Government has labeled its *modus operandi* as “**empowerment capitalism**.” The object has been to ensure that every adult in Antigua and Barbuda is afforded an opportunity to participate in wealth-creation across generations, by arranging for citizens’ participation in ownership of shares in government enterprises. **10%** of the government’s **51%** ownership of shares in West Indies Oil Company (**WIOC**) were sold to ordinary Antiguan and Barbudans. In due course, my Government’s ownership in banks, a dredging company, hotels, State Insurance and other profit-making capitalist enterprises will **in part** be sold to our citizens. Those who hold savings accounts, earning low interest, are assured of higher returns from share-ownership—**empowerment capitalism** at work.

15. Furthermore, my Government has established a wealth management firm called the *National Asset Management Company* (**NAMCO**). It serves as the beneficiary of the earned dividends that are paid to my Government as a shareholder in private enterprises. That approach of generating investment capital that may be set aside for ownership in additional capitalist enterprises, is a new undertaking for Antigua and Barbuda.

Over the ensuing 25 years of this 21st Century, or by the year 2050, history will absolve my Government.

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:

Investing in Healthcare in Order to Ensure Longer Lives

16. When the Medical Benefits Scheme was introduced in 1978, it was intended to ensure that workers of limited means, especially, as they grew older, would have free access to doctors and prescription medicines whenever they became ill. The

originators did not wish for a sick person to be made destitute by illness, nor to exhaust his/her savings when illness struck. Eleven common diseases are covered. Everyone who contributes to the MBS by way of deductions from wages and salaries, or direct payments if self-employed, is assured of medicines and doctors at no cost or at a small percentage of overall cost. At first, deductions were legislated at 2.5% of wages to be paid by both employees and employers; it has moved to 3.5%. No other country in our CARICOM, my Government reports, has any scheme that is similar, nor for as many as 46 years. The MBS is truly innovative.

17. Following careful consideration and thoughtful expertise, Antigua and Barbuda will transform its MBS into a **National Health Insurance** plan in 2026. The object is to increase coverage, add to the number of diseases covered, and make the Insurance plan transferable within CARICOM. No-one is to be left behind, my Government asserts, especially the elderly and the unwell.

18. My Government nevertheless encourages a wellness approach to living, in order to reduce the chances of contracting non-communicable diseases (**NCDs**). Hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer and chronic respiratory disease maim and kill far too many of our citizens. Reducing the consumption of processed foods and of alcohol, eating more fresh fruit and vegetables, exercising and ending the sedentary lifestyle, will all ensure better health and a longer life.

19. One of the illnesses that will receive significant attention from my Government is that of mental health. A modern approach to address mental health has been brought to the attention of the United Nations by my Government, and creative solutions from around the world are being examined as alternatives to the dreadful treatment which mental health patients receive, globally. By purchasing a new facility in Seaview Farm, and retrofitting it to meet the requirements of those in need of wellness treatment, my Government hopes to change significantly the stigma which attaches to this illness. The Minister of Health is to be congratulated for his outstanding leadership.

Because of the harm inflicted on our body's organs from high blood pressure, diabetes and even inherited illnesses, an alarming number of men and women suffer from kidney failure. **Dialysis** serves as a method of preserving life. The

demand for the service has compelled investment in a new building at the old Holberton site that is purpose-built. More than 100 patients will be served daily, each at least twice per week, where their blood will be transfused and cleaned of all impurities. It is my Government's intention to build an operating room in that facility where kidney transplants can also be undertaken. Thus far, the team from the SLBMC has undertaken 11 kidney transplants successfully. Congrats!

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:

Foreign Affairs and Projecting Strength

20. Antigua and Barbuda has been classified as the “Meetings and Conferences Venue of the Caribbean.” Working collaboratively with the American University of Antigua (**AUA**), a new Conference Center was erected within the University's compound, capable of housing a U.N. gathering of its 194 member-states, affiliate organizations and NGOs simultaneously. My Government made it possible to host the **4th United Nations International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS)** in May 2024. Since that very first gathering of more than 5,000 delegates, my Government has hosted a Caribbean Hotels and Tourism Conference of 800 delegates; hosted the 55th General Assembly of the Organization of American States attended by thousands of delegates; and, that venue is soon to host the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (**CHOGM**) next year November, where even more thousands of delegates are expected to attend. While the ambition to construct a large conference center had been considered for decades, my Government has achieved the end that alluded previous administrations.

21. My Government continues to advocate for the Caribbean region and its environs to be considered “**A Zone of Peace**”. And, my Government joins with all others to advocate for the peaceful settlement of disputes between States and to eschew the use of force. The use of lethal force against fishing vessels and other small craft in the Caribbean Sea cannot be deemed lawful.

22. My Government continues to oppose the embargo against Cuba, more than six decades old; and, stands opposed to having Cuba designated a state sponsor of terrorism. The stranglehold on Cuba for political reasons is unjust. The attempt to squeeze shut its Medical Brigade program does harm to the people of Antigua and Barbuda and other Caribbean States. My Government has taken the necessary steps to ensure that there is no trafficking and that the doctors, nurses, engineers and other Cuban professionals are paid amounts equivalent to their Antigua and Barbuda counterparts. Antigua and Barbuda will continue to utilize the expertise which Cuba offers, knowing that our country's human-resource base may--for a future period--fall below its necessary level. The Foreign Minister, himself a graduate of a Cuban University, has been courageous and firm, articulating the Government's policy with clarity and commonsense. Thank you, Minister!

23. My Government has utilized every multilateral forum in which it has membership to advocate for **Climate Justice**. Industrial/developed States have been using the skies for more than a century as a dumping ground for billions of tons of unwanted gases and particulate matter, which their industries and transport systems emit freely. My Government therefore sought and joined with other island-States to be handed two favorable decisions that are clear indictments of the behaviors of these large polluters:

i) ***The International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea (ITLOS)*** has ruled that pollution emitted over the sovereign territory of a large State becomes pollution of the oceans, since adverse impacts are recorded upon these large bodies of water. Acidification and thermal expansion are two pressing dangers that spring from the Oceans, threatening fish stocks and the shorelines of small islands everywhere.

ii) ***The International Court of Justice (ICJ)*** was asked to examine the issue of the obligations of States in relation to emissions of green-house-gases. In its declaration, ***the polluter pays principle*** is given legal clarity with the obligation placed squarely on the shoulders of the polluter-States.

The warming seas provide the fuel for hurricanes and cyclones; their winds and rain cause normal life to cease during long recovery periods. **Hurricane Irma** devastated Barbuda in 2017, costing more than US\$200 million in damages. **Hurricane Melissa**,

which struck Jamaica a few weeks ago, has inflicted hundreds of millions of dollars in damage across the whole island. It will likely take years to return Jamaica to its pre-Melissa state. Antigua and Barbuda through its leadership of the Alliance of Small Island States (**AOSIS**) will never lose its voice over this existential threat to the security and habitability of our beautiful Caribbean. The creation of a “**Loss and Damage Fund**” will ensure that there will be no need to go begging following every disaster.

24. Utilizing the 1992 U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Conferences of the Parties (**COP30**) that have followed, my Government participates fully in the negotiations, and applauds the Prime Minister, the Minister of the Environment and the Foreign Minister, among others, for they have borne this heavy burden gladly.

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, Investment and Infrastructure

25. My Government has acted to diversify the tourism product for which Antigua and Barbuda has become known. A deliberate effort to secure more luxurious and higher-priced resorts is beginning to yield more in taxes, more in employment, more in satisfaction from the customers who travel to our destination to bask in Antiguan and Barbudan hospitality and luxury. Hence, significant investments are flowing into the development of more luxury resorts that in turn yield a higher return to the Treasury of Antigua and Barbuda. Yet, all hotel-property operators are aware that the vast number of customers fly economy class and occupy regular rooms upon arrival. It is estimated that 450,000 overnight passengers will land in Antigua and Barbuda during the 2025/2026 tourism season. Nearly 1,000,000 cruise tourism passengers are expected to arrive during the same period. Antigua and Barbuda will experience the most successful year ever, during the upcoming 2025/2026 season, thanks to the marketing efforts of all stakeholders but especially so to the Tourism Department and the strategic thinking of the best Minister of Tourism. Congratulations, Sir!

26. My Government is pleased to announce that a new Rosewood Hotel will be constructed on Barbuda's south shore. A new Nobu Resort will also be constructed in Barbuda, next to the restaurant. There are now 350 rooms functioning at the P.L.H. project in Barbuda. Other projects, several of which are small, are slated for construction on Barbuda by Barbudans who are collaborating with investors who have significant capital. On Antigua, the Nikki Beach project will be constructed by Calvin Ayre. The Government will become a significant investor in the Jolly Beach Hotel rehabilitation and expansion project that will accommodate those who fly in the back of the airplanes, constituting the majority of arrivals in Antigua. Yeptons Beach will see the completion of a new property that will carry a Marriott label. Several high-end restaurants will also become a part of the tourism food and beverage product. The future of tourism is bright and getting brighter. What started out as a gamble in 1952, that became a replacement for sugar in 1972, has now mushroomed into a wealth-creating industry that benefits all of us. ***Tourism***, my Government asserts, ***is everybody's business***.

27. My Government is fully aware that better roads and highways, improved water and electricity supply, better telecommunications and faster broadband services, a smooth runway and improved port facilities, will make for a more productive Antigua and Barbuda. Significant capital investments have therefore been made in these sub-sectors in order to attract more capital and to grow our economy by at least 7% on average annually.

28. My Government has therefore arranged for a consortium of banks to loan **\$100 million dollars** for road re-construction and repairs, guaranteed by a dedicated fund to which all vehicle owners have begun to contribute. In virtually every community and village of Antigua, many have already witnessed the increased effort to pave decrepit roads. My Government is aware that automobile ownership has become affordable to all income groups, owing to regular forgiveness of a portion of the duty that would otherwise attach to the purchase and importation. In order to reduce the owners' auto repair bills and to keep the roadways at a high standard, my Government intends to build many miles of smooth and lasting roads going forward. The Minister of Works, whose shining integrity acts as a model for

others, has performed extremely well, motivating road crews; she deserves our applause and encouragement.

29. The resurfacing of the runway at the V.C. Bird International Airport will continue with little interruption of daily air traffic. The re-piping under the roadways prior to their resurfacing will also be undertaken with help from our friends from China. The planting of an underwater sea-cable, intended to reduce Internet cost to consumers and to speed connectivity, will be forthcoming in 2026. My Government asserts that infrastructural improvements and multiple investments in new enterprises will therefore mark both growth and stability, in Antigua and Barbuda, in the foreseeable future.

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, Agriculture, Housing and Social Transformation

30. When my Government decided to repurpose China's gift of a school in order to welcome the Fourth Landed Campus of the University of the West Indies, the decision-makers knew that the campus would surely have to be enlarged, the existing Primary School had to be relocated, and a future Five Islands would become like every college town -- bigger and better. My Government made use of an offer by Saudi Arabia to tap into the Saudi Development Fund. A loan of USD\$80 million was negotiated, and the plans called for purchasing acres of surrounding land, building a new Primary School and a new Five Islands Secondary School, expanding the existing UWI schoolrooms, building dormitories, and improving the infrastructure around the UWI Campus. The program has moved from planning to execution.

31. My Government is pleased to announce that construction has begun on the new Primary School at Five Islands. Its completion will take a little more than one year. The build-out of the University campus will commence early next year, and the village of Five Islands is beginning its transformation. Now is a good time, my

Government asserts, for the entrepreneurs to begin taking steps to maximize investments in Five Islands. Meanwhile, the Glanvilles School of Agriculture will start its transformational work in January 2026, as my Government seeks to bring food sovereignty and food security closer to reality by training the farmers of tomorrow in advanced techniques and utilizing new technologies. My Government thanks the People's Republic of China for its contribution to advancing agricultural output by the transfer of technology which it freely shares.

32. The completion of: the Fine Arts Theater on High Street, the YASCO track and field infrastructure on Old Parham Road, the Aquatic Center at the Harrison Center, and the continuous upgrades to the existing school plants across the country, will consume significant resources of the Board of Education, and of the grants and loans that were secured. The Antigua and Barbuda youth are being well prepared to demonstrate the excellence that our country's forebears predicted would ensue with perseverance and good governance. The unrelenting efforts of the Minister to demonstrate excellent leadership in education, sports, and festivals, when his detractors showered him with skepticism, earns him my Government's congratulations!

My Government joins in celebrating the second Rhodes Scholar from Antigua and Barbuda, **Miss Resa B. Nelson**. She emerged as the top candidate from among the finalists from the Commonwealth Caribbean. My Government expresses its gratitude to the educators, mentors, family members, community supporters who have contributed to Miss Nelson's growth and development. Our country's system of educating its youth has resulted in many outstanding scholars, which attests to the rigors of our curriculum and the room for excellence which all of Antigua and Barbuda enjoys.

AGRICULTURE

33. After deciding to make the most of his elected position in the Parliament of Antigua and Barbuda as an Independent member, the new Minister of Agriculture has demonstrated significant capacity in raising the bar. While agriculture has historically been 3% to 5% of our tourism-based economy, dedicated farmers and backyard farmers have raised significantly the nation's agricultural output. The

people of Antigua and Barbuda have been growing more of their own food “***from farm to table***”. Many hotels--the largest institutional consumers of fresh fruit, leafy greens and vegetables--have been consuming more locally-produced farm products.

34. Antigua and Barbuda is now self-sufficient in egg production, and poultry farmers are aiming to produce enough chicken meat to reach that capacity also. A new abattoir for the slaughter of chickens will be built, and a modernized abattoir for quadrupeds will also be constructed. It is of interest to note that a single farm in Antigua produces sufficient pigs so that fresh pork meat is sold each week, enough to satisfy a significant portion of market demand. Meats that have been refrigerated for months before getting to the table, are not nearly as nutritious as meat freshly prepared by our local butchers. The Central Marketing Corporation (**CMC**) has begun to play a very significant role in guaranteeing farmers a market for their products. The investment in a new property by the CMC reflects the expanded vision.

35. While water has almost always been a challenge for farmers, the construction of multiple small dams and ponds points the way to self-sufficiency in farm water-supply. My Government is sparing no effort to assist farmers to create and to manage water supply more efficiently. Conservation of water is absolute and perennial, despite the recent showers that have made 2025 one of the wettest years in recent times. No farm can succeed without a reliable supply of water. While APUA can supply those farms that are located near laid pipelines, complete reliance upon the utility's water supply is an error. Further, treated water, the scientists advise, impacts soil health when utilized for long periods.

36. The distribution of fertilizers to farmers forms an important effort to increase production, while the provision of duty-free treatment of tractors, of trucks and other farm equipment, helps to lower the cost of production which can be passed on to consumers in order to lower the price of fresh farm products. My Government has made every effort to boost agricultural production in order to satisfy the zero-hunger initiative to which all countries are pledged. Antigua and Barbuda's food import bill is still high, and the Common External Tariff (**CET**), agreed-to by all

CARICOM Member States, ensures that many imported foods are zero-rated. The Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have succeeded in creating shipping bottlenecks that caused the prices of many goods, including food, to rise unexpectedly.

HOUSING AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

37. My Government and private contractors have built more than 1,000 units of housing since 2014 and still the demand for new homes grows. Several new developments will expand the housing market and allow young couples and single moms to own their piece of the rock. When the Booby Alley Project is complete, 200 condominium-style units will become available to former residents and others. In Barbuda and Bolans, 100 of these condos will be constructed, 50 in each venue for the villages to house larger populations of homeowners. My Government expresses its appreciation to the People's Republic of China for its generosity. The National Housing and Urban Renewal Corporation will continue to provide subsidized housing at cost, with considerable equity accruing to the homeowners. The Central Housing and Planning Authority (**CHAPA**) will continue to build affordable housing that will set a new standard of resiliency to withstand Category 5 hurricanes.

38. While every effort is made to improve housing standards for the working class and the able-bodied, my Government acts with equal vigor to ensure that the poor and the elderly are not left behind. Each month, hundreds of thousands of dollars are distributed by food vouchers, provided to the unemployed and to others whose incomes fall below the poverty line. This program is to ensure zero hunger within our society, my Government asserts. PDV-Caribe also provides a \$100 voucher to those in need and older than 65 years, in order to reduce their expenditure on electricity; no-one should dwell in darkness, nor risk fires by burning candles at night. Thanks to the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, this program continues. The Social Security Board pays a minimum of \$500 dollars monthly to retirees, even those who did not contribute, in order to ensure no-one goes to bed hungry at night. A soup kitchen is also operated by an NGO that

receives public assistance. And, the **HAPI Program (*Housing Assistance for the Poor and Indigent*)** utilizes the talent locked-up in His Majesty's Prison to build homes for those who have lost everything in fires, or whose homes are less than acceptable for human habitation. My Government asserts that **"it is a government that has a heart and is caring."** The Minister whose responsibilities include Housing and Social Transformation embodies the kindest, most gentle spirit of this administration and deserves the nation's applause!

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 LAW, PUBLIC SAFETY, THE POPULATION CENSUS

39. My Government pledges to continue to uphold the rule of law and transparency in governance. In the ***World Justice Project Report 2025*** which measures the degree to which Governments uphold the rule of law, Antigua and Barbuda was ranked 2nd among the CARICOM countries on the Rule of Law Index, and 38th among 143 States. This is a remarkable achievement which demonstrates my Government's unwavering commitment to abiding by the law.

40. The Ministry of Legal Affairs will be provided with the resources required to expand the corps of legal draft-persons, available to draft new and amended laws upon the instructions of the Attorney General. It is the intention of my Government to amend the Labour Code such that workers in all sectors of the economy are able to be properly represented and their interest protected at all times. Employers too will receive equitable treatment. It is also the intention of the Labour Ministry to activate ***the Advisory Committee on the National Minimum Wage***, in order to establish a new national minimum wage for Antigua and Barbuda.

41. The Industrial Court—designed to hear cases that have not been resolved at the lower levels—will be augmented by the addition of new Judges. That increase will allow for a backlog of cases to be heard, and for matters assigned to the Court to be dispatched at a far speedier rate than now exists. My Government will re-

commence the rebuilding of the old Parliament building in 2026; it will serve as the Family Court, isolating its sittings from the Magistrates Courts. It will be a model for the Eastern Caribbean.

PUBLIC SAFETY

42. Law enforcement will continue to be fully supported by my Government. A 10% reduction in serious crimes during the 10 months of 2025 --January to October-- compared to the same period in 2024, has been recorded by the Crime Statistics Division. Leadership matters, my Government asserts. A few categories witnessed slight increases; nevertheless, the Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda, under very competent leadership, will continue to strengthen its crime-fighting capabilities. The Royal Police Force will be investing in more community policing, supporting neighbourhood watch groups, and undertaking more foot and vehicular patrols. Legislation for the establishment of **the Antigua and Barbuda Forensic Services** will be introduced in the first quarter of 2026, and training of staff in drug analysis will follow. Developing the Biology Department and certified training of chemistry staff will be an integral part of this mix.

43. Rehabilitation of convicted prisoners will become the focus of the Superintendent of His Majesty's Prison. In order to reduce or eliminate recidivism, or the return to a criminal lifestyle upon release, my Government will cause rehabilitation to become a cornerstone of the prison experience. Training in several skills will be undertaken and, therefore, additional correctional officers capable of imparting skills, will be a new requirement of the job function. The experienced and highly motivated Attorney General is to be thanked for the vigor and intelligence he has brought to this Ministry. The Antigua and Barbuda Defense Force has played a critical role in partnership with the Royal Police, and my Government applauds its leadership for its significant contribution to reducing anti-social behaviour all year round, but especially during festivals.

THE TEN-YEAR POPULATION CENSUS

My Government seeks the cooperation of all who live and reside on Antigua and Barbuda in the completion of the required Population Census. Many policy decisions hinge on the accurate reporting of the enumerators who will come knocking on your doors. It is imperative for the answers given to be truthful, so that the data compiled will accurately reflect the conditions in our beloved Antigua and Barbuda. Absolute confidentiality and anonymity is guaranteed, and so there is no need to conceal the truth from the officials who will wear identification tags that will assure you of their authenticity. Please collaborate.

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

This past year, 2025, was among the most successful ever witnessed by the people of Antigua and Barbuda, my Government asserts. There were no storms nor hurricanes, there was plenty of rain, and the country recorded enormous strides in virtually every sector of the economy. The people's feeling of security and well-being has been justified by the actions of law enforcement; and, the performing economy generated wealth across all income groups.

The Citizenship by Investment Program (**CIP**), first proposed to the Parliament by the Representative of St. John's City West, now accounts for more than 10% of the country's GDP. The creation of a sub-regional Regulatory body of the O.E.C.S. assures its continued profitability. The expansion of LIAT Air, to include destinations outside of the Eastern Caribbean, provides living proof of the sustainability of a carrier that was once portrayed as a dead horse. When Air Peace commences regular flights between the African continent and Antigua, LIAT Air is to be the carrier that will distribute tourists and business people from the hub in Antigua to other Caribbean territories. The Phoenix has risen, my Government asserts.

The betrayal of the integrity of our Customs and Excise Division by a small number who conspired to cheat the Treasury is now over; restitution has begun. It is a superior outcome to the “name and shame” which a vocal group has advocated, my Government believes.

The building and forward movement of Antigua and Barbuda continues unabated, and great pride is felt by our citizens for the daring roles which our little country plays on the world stage, leading multilateral institutions to bend to our leadership. Our forebears, in this our 44th year of sovereignty and Independence, would feel justified by the enormous steps which the past 25 years have witnessed towards creating and distributing wealth among our citizens and residents. The purpose for our very existence, as a colony, was to extract wealth in order to benefit others. We have turned the historical tables on that past.

The New Year 2026 has a very bright outlook. Major improvements in our infrastructure, in our learning institutions, in our banking and capital markets, in the athletic and sports divisions, in Carnival and culture, are in the cards. We pray for a Christmas that will bring peace and happiness to all who live and work in our beautiful country and region, and wish a healthy and prosperous 2026 to all.

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 thank you.