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Governor-General of Antigua and Barbuda

Delivers the 2024 Speech from the Throne

EMBRACING THE LEGACY, SHAPING THE FUTURE

Thursday, 7 December 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

1. Lady Williams and I wish our fellow citizens and residents alike a healthy, safe, and enjoyable Christmas and a prosperous New Year 2024. The idea of reflection and renewal, inherent in the changing calendar, will always provide an opportunity to make assessments of our past performance and to focus upon shaping our unknowable future. In our case, here in Antigua and Barbuda and in the states with Westminster systems, this Parliamentary exercise allows for a formal review and to address the plans of Government for the immediate future and beyond.

2. **Embracing The Legacy, Shaping the Future:** is a fitting encapsulation of our nation's drive. It continues to be important for us to have knowledge of the past shared by the historians; and, for an appreciation of the legacy created by our forebears. Yet, the people of Antigua and Barbuda must never lose sight of the future that is being shaped as a consequence of the many forces acting upon us, through history, through the new technologies, and hinged on the expectations of our youth that fuel our changing ambitions. Excellence in all of our undertakings is the benchmark of success.

3. In that regard, I take this opportunity to congratulate our newest knight, Sir Steadroy Benjamin, a parliamentarian of 42 years, for his sterling service to his country. A teacher of law and a community activist, Sir Steadroy has made a contribution to the country which he loves that can hardly be duplicated.

Like Sir Robin Yearwood and Sir Molwyn Joseph--both having spent decades in the Parliament representing the people of various communities--your contributions to nation-building are a record of astounding success which is built on faith. You are trusted to do what is right, and you have been justly rewarded.

I join in congratulating Sir Robert Barrett and all 14 recipients of National Honours at the recently-held Independence Ceremonial event. The nation takes pride in your many outstanding achievements.

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:

GLOBAL ISSUES IMPACTING ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

4. My Government expresses its thanks to the Almighty by noting that our islands were spared the destruction that caused severe hardship and pain, in years past, but not during the recently-ended hurricane season. While Felipe and Tammy interrupted air traffic and disrupted economic activity, the weather systems blessed us with sufficient rain to cause our parched land to feel rejuvenated. Although some farmers lost their crops, and a few homes in low-lying communities were flooded, the overall good flowing from these weather events gives us reason to be thankful. The shortage of potable water, brought on by a drought that is the worst in more than 100 years, tested the patience of many a household and hotel. Global climate change, the culprit that has inflicted heavy losses on Small Island-Developing States (or SIDS) globally, has reached crisis proportions.

5. In May 2024, a mere six months from today, the world will gather in Antigua, at the Campus of the American University of Antigua (AUA), to set new directions for a civilization that requires sentinels to warn of the impending destruction if global temperatures continue to rise. The practice of dumping billions of tons of greenhouse gases and particulate matter into our skies, annually, has placed civilization on the precipice of a disaster. The “**loss and damage**” which small islands suffer, though their global contribution to warming is negligible, reminds us that “**the polluter pays**” principle has great currency. My Government expects significant results from the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and from the SIDS Conference which Antigua and Barbuda will host next May 2024.

6. My Government thanks, in advance, the leaders and the many volunteers who will make the SIDS Conference here a success, knowing that all the world will be focused upon Antigua and Barbuda’s efficiencies in the May Conference. A special thank you goes out to our Ambassador to the United Nations and his team who have placed our nation at the center of this struggle for climate justice.

The Prime Minister has played a pivotal role during his chairmanship of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) at the United Nations; as well as, through his

leadership of the COSIS (the Commission of Small Island States); his championship of “**the loss and damage**” issue; his astute guidance on the legal basis for liability, before the Court of the Law of the Sea, in search of a legal principle on which to rest our case; and, his advancement of the multi-dimensional vulnerability index (the MVI) as a means of measuring access to concessional financing. The future which Antigua and Barbuda is safeguarding will inure to the benefit of all humankind in the decades to come. Congratulations, Prime Minister.

7. The war between Ukraine and the Russian Federation has spurred hardship and increases in food prices across the globe. The inability of Ukraine to ship its wheat to many places with which it once traded, has caused a greater demand to be placed on the supplies available; the shortage has pushed the price of certain foods upwards, as demand increases and supply remains constant. Antigua and Barbuda decries this brutal assault on the sovereignty of Ukraine, and seeks a peaceful end to this conflict. Our small nation’s ability to achieve food security is hobbled by known circumstances; yet, my Government intends to overcome the many challenges.

8. The potential good uses to which **artificial intelligence** (or **A.I.**) can be put is incredulous; in health, in security, in fighting crime, in securing answers to many seemingly insoluble challenges, in agriculture, the use of **artificial intelligence** is sure to be transformative. My Government has assigned the task of crafting appropriate legislation to the highly intelligent lawyers in the Ministry of Legal Affairs. It will not be necessary to re-invent the wheel. With the assistance of the CARICOM Secretariat and legislation created elsewhere to manage the uses of **A.I.**, my Government intends to bring into being the appropriate laws to prevent abuse and to encourage innovative use of this new technology. In this regard, the UWI-Five Islands Campus has been asked by my Government to specialize in the teaching and application of **A.I.** as a specialty for which the campus will be known. My Government will ensure that this embrace of **A.I.** is the future.

9. The disagreement between Guyana and Venezuela on the issue of their borders is a matter that is more than a century old. Attempts at finding a lasting agreement have been elusive, since there is so much at stake. My Government hopes that there will be a peaceful settlement in this long-standing matter. These two States are not just geographic neighbours. Guyana is our kith and kin, having a significant diaspora living in Antigua and Barbuda. Venezuela has shown its lasting friendship,

coming to our Government's assistance at critical moments when no other states could. The CARICOM has issued a Statement following the ruling of the International Court of Justice. Antigua and Barbuda stands with the CARICOM.

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:

DOMESTIC ISSUES THAT CHALLENGE OUR SMARTEST MINDS

10. The most vexing issue faced by my Government in the past decade has been a drought of epic proportions, the very worst in 100 years of record-keeping. Global climate change is the identified culprit. The absence of adequate rainfall since 2014 has meant that our stored water resources—whether dams, reservoirs, ponds, cisterns, tanks or drums—have been exhausted by use, without adequate rainfall to refill or to re-supply the precious substance. The Antigua population then looks, reasonably, to the Antigua Public Utilities Authority (APUA) to meet the potable water needs of our island-State. The new Minister has utilized his tried and tested superior management skills to change the circumstances; my Government has faith in his abilities to achieve the desired outcomes.

My Government has spent more than USD100 million to purchase new Reverse Osmosis plants and to provide costly maintenance to the existing plants; yet, the APUA has not been able to reach the levels of production that satisfy the demand for potable water island-wide. APUA can produce by way of its plants, approximately 7.5 million gallons of potable water daily. The demand for water exceeds that amount by at least 4.5 million gallons daily. The APUA attempt to ration water and to publicize daily a rationing schedule, aimed at assuring the communities that water would be available for fixed hours each day, was very noble. A number of residents are of the view that it did not work as well as the APUA intended.

Tropical Storm Felipe and Hurricane Tammy provided significant rainfall that caused many dams, reservoirs, ponds and storage systems to collect considerable quantities of fresh water. Those events have changed the dynamics and made the availability of 12 million gallons of potable water daily, less challenging for APUA. New leadership and a new approach to water production at the APUA are sure to bring new energy and innovation to a challenged APUA Water Division.

11. My Government congratulates the APUA Telecomms Division for its competitive approach towards the broadband services which it offers. The plan to install its own underwater cable, rather than purchase the service from a private provider—that can at times inflict usurious rates—is a wise decision. Moving to 5G technology will require significant investments in APUA’s infrastructure; that is a policy decision that has already been made at the urging of the Minister, and that will be implemented. APUA Telecomms brings significant income and profits to this statutory authority; every effort is therefore being made by my Government to ensure that it can continue to provide the reliable revenue-underpinning to this statutory enterprise of 800+ employees.

12. APUA Electricity provides a vital product that cannot be seen and dare not be touched, but nevertheless exists and must be supplied. The daily demand for electricity at peak is 61 megawatts; the capacity which APUA now controls is close to 80 megawatts. Because of our international obligations to reduce the Antigua and Barbuda carbon footprint, the plants that are driven by Bunker Sea petroleum must be phased out, and new plants that are driven by wind, solar energy, ocean-thermal, or other renewables are to be installed. The midway point between the fossil-fuel-driven plants and the renewables is Liquid Natural Gas (**LNG**). My Government has invested in such a plant through a BOOT arrangement (buy-own-operate-transfer) that will lend for a significant reduction in CO2 emissions, until less costly batteries become available.

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:

13. My Government congratulates the Minister of Health and the Cabinet of Antigua and Barbuda for designing a Covid-19 management policy in 2020 that allowed Antigua and Barbuda to quickly return to business a year later, following the decline of the global pandemic. Because our nation suffered relatively few deaths; because our healthcare system was able to deliver vaccines to more than 66% of the eligible population, within a short time; because the 13,000 workers in the hospitality industry were able to get back to work after a short period of furlough; and, because all Government employees received their wages and salaries on time, many now disregard the perilous choices that were advocated but which my Government did NOT adopt.

The management history which was created by this pandemic cannot be dismissed as though it were an ordinary event. The skillful governance of the year-long challenges to Government policies includes the resisting antivaxxers, who deliberately took to the streets, violently engaged the Fire Service and the Police when ordered to disperse on August 8, 2020, and placed the country in mortal danger. By having the foresight back then to respond in the most appropriate way—securing vaccines in sufficient numbers, providing tangible evidence of vaccines dispensed, and isolating the infected—my Government scored very highly, history will recall.

14. On the management of the environment, my Government has also scored very highly. The ban on plastic shopping bags, replaced by the introduction of reusable canvas bags at supermarkets and elsewhere; the ban on foam dishes, foam receptacles and their replacement with bio-degradable paper items; the ban on plastic straws and their replacement with paper straws, all served as attempts to involve the entire population in improving our living environment, reducing harmful waste and presenting a more tidy Antigua and Barbuda to residents and visitors alike. Much has been achieved, my Government believes, and there is more to come.

There is a plan to replace the fleet of Government-owned internal-combustion-engine vehicles—numbering more than 180—with electric vehicles that burn no fossil fuels. Over phased periods, the cars, buses, vans, ambulances and trucks that fill up with gasoline and diesel will instead plug-in; using cheaper and cleaner electricity to re-charge after 200 miles of stored power.

15. In 2022, the total value of imported oil amounted to approximately EC\$400 million; by the end of this year, a similar amount will likely have been expended on oil imports. As the economy grows, even more energy will be required. My Government intends to reduce the quantum which it expends on the purchase and use of fossil fuels by turning to electric vehicles, by installing solar plants in schools and other Government-owned buildings, by mounting wind-powered plants, and by encouraging conservation in the use of the precious commodity that pollutes.

16. The Antigua and Barbuda people expect a great deal from my Government. The quest to become an economic powerhouse is very much uppermost in the minds of the decision-makers when multi-faceted policies are being contemplated by the Cabinet of Ministers. The waiver of Customs Duty, the ABST, the Revenue Recovery

Charge and, in some instances, the Environmental Levy, has caused my Government to waive nearly EC\$300 million in taxes in 2022 and a similar amount in 2023. EC\$175 million was discretionary, the other portion is decreed by Statute. My Government intends to reduce the discretionary waivers in order to increase tax yields and to meet the additional obligations of pensions, salaries and wages increases negotiated with trade unions.

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 THAT THE CABINET AND MINISTER HAVE ENGINEERED

17. My Government's relations with the rest of the world, outside of our CARICOM borders, reflects a designed foreign policy that yields significant returns for our citizens. My Government's Minister of Foreign Affairs has supervised closely and adroitly the roles which Antigua and Barbuda's diplomats play in accord with the domestic objective to create a State that meets the reasonable expectations of its 100,000 citizens and residents.

i. The historic friends of Antigua and Barbuda--the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Canada--have continued to demonstrate their interest in, and regard for, our sovereign State, whether by way of scholarships, training opportunities for civil servants, and the provision of security training that combine to make our country a better place, and its governance superior.

ii. Relatively new friends that enhance our capabilities include the Peoples' Republic of China whose generosity is remarkable, in its relations with my Government. ***China's Belt and Road Initiative***, launched 10 years ago in 2013, enabled the re-construction and enlargement of the St. John's Cargo Port facilities, the modernization of the Sir V.C. Bird Airport Terminal, and grants from its Gratuitous Aid Program. The China Export/Import Bank has been a significant player in the forward development of our island-country. China's contribution to the upcoming SIDS Conference in May 2024, is remarkably generous.

iii. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, despite its own challenges, has worked with Antigua and Barbuda to lower the cost to consumers of valuable petroleum supplies. Sanctions have made the robust export of its main product nearly impossible; however, a loosening of those sanctions has recently allowed

Venezuela to regain some of the lost ground that deprived its people of the benefit of their natural resources. Antigua and Barbuda continues to stand with Venezuela.

iv. The Republic of Cuba, sixty years under an embargo, has learned to survive the punishing resolve of its giant neighbour. The Cuban Government still extends scholarship opportunities to our youth, enabling many who are talented to become engineers, nurses, medical doctors, saving lives and addressing illnesses. The Cuban and Chinese hospitals that treat diabetics without having to amputate limbs have lessons to teach our practitioners, and to supply medicines with which we must fill our pharmacies.

v. Saudi Arabia has recently begun to strengthen its ties with our CARICOM States. Antigua and Barbuda has provided leadership towards this end, and is the first to make use of a USD2.5 billion fund that the Gulf State has set aside for regional development. USD80 millions are to be dispensed to Antigua and Barbuda in order to strengthen the offerings of the University of the West Indies—Five Islands Campus—a linchpin in the ambitious development of the O.E.C.S. countries, led by Antigua and Barbuda.

vi. The Dominican Republic, a bustling economic success story that is attracting multiple investments, especially in the hospitality sector, has decided to assist Antigua and Barbuda by building a school on Barbuda; it remains a solid friend. A diaspora community, integrated to a large extent into the social fabric of Antigua and Barbuda, continues to make contributions to the development of their adopted country.

vii. The Republic of India has been especially helpful during the pandemic, providing vaccines, face masks, and other technical cooperation during the difficult months when gloom was the order of the day. India has always provided more than a glimmer of hope; its historic role in 1947, when it ended colonialism, provided the impetus that would help to bring that system to a rapid end in Asia and Africa and the Caribbean.

viii. The multilateral institutions in which Antigua and Barbuda claims membership have continued to serve our interests well. My Government congratulates the Antigua and Barbuda Ambassadors/Permanent Representatives to the O.A.S., to the United Nations, to the Commonwealth of Nations, and the Representative to CARICOM for their sterling service to the nation.

ix. In that regard, the intractable challenge that is Haiti has been made worse since the assassination of its President. My Government has agreed to lend a small number of policemen to the United Nations' effort to stabilize the governance of the Caribbean's oldest sovereign State. Kenya is to be congratulated for offering to

dispatch 1,000 of its policemen to augment Haiti's National Police Force, neutralizing armed gangs. The countries of the Caribbean must do all that can be done to repay Haiti for its role in speeding an end to the slave trade in 1807, and slavery in 1834, triggered by its declaration of Independence in 1804.

My Government's foreign policy, designed by its Minister of Foreign Affairs, executed in part by the technicians at the Ministry and Heads of Mission abroad, serve the vital interests of our State and multiply the material and psychological well-being of the emancipated people of a sovereign Antigua and Barbuda.

18. Although Cricket West Indies (**C.W.I.**) is not a diplomatic embassy, the Agreement signed with this entity gives it the status of a multilateral diplomatic agency. Its presence in Antigua for decades has benefited the host country immensely. The plans which the **C.W.I.** has articulated for further promotion of West Indies cricket will make Antigua a central media hub, receiving and editing all West Indies cricket matches being played around the world, and then broadcasting packages which **C.W.I.** will offer for sale to old and new media outlets globally. **C.W.I.** will spend millions of dollars and hire many youthful **I.T.** specialists to make this advance possible. The Minister of Sports can take credit for bringing these ambitious plans to the Cabinet for its approval; and, the Minister of Public Utilities is playing a substantive role in providing A.P.U.A.'s expertise in planting the black fiber and burying new conduits for regular fiber optic cables to **C.W.I.**'s Coolidge Headquarters.

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:

FIXING THE HIGHWAYS, COMMUNITY ROADS, REPAIRING PUBLIC PROPERTIES

19.i. On November 8th and 9th, 2020, more than 21 inches of rain fell on Antigua and Barbuda, flooding streets and highways, destroying bridges and conduits, and causing more than \$200 million in damages to the nation's road infrastructure. My Government decided to fix the major highways first, and to move to community roads after. Drivers can attest to the superior surface of the Factory Road Highway from the intersection of the Sir George Walter Highway, stretching past the Sir Viv Richards Stadium to the Village of Wilikies; to the smooth surface of the highway from Golden Grove to Old Road; and, the quality drive of two major rehabilitated highways—the Airport Road and the Friars Hill Road—with a grant from the British.

The major arteries in Antigua and also on Barbuda are excellent examples of road engineering.

ii. Now, my Government, through the Ministry of Works, is turning its attention to the repair and resurfacing of community roads. Over 400 miles of these roads exist. The Minister of Works has justly focused attention on those communities where the cast-iron and PVC pipes, buried beneath the roads' surface for decades, are now leaking and need to be replaced with the more resilient and flexible IDPU pipes. Collaboration with the Ministry of Public Utilities is therefore a prerequisite to determining the communities to be prioritized. My Government will set aside a considerable amount in the 2024 Estimates for the continued repair of roads and piping, in order to ensure that citizens and residents can have continuous access to potable water and smooth road surfaces on which to drive.

iii. My Government must also ensure that the buildings in which its employees work are safe and healthy. Mother Nature is very busy in tropical climates. Mold and other threats to human health can quickly spread to air conditioning systems as temperatures and damp conditions fluctuate. The older the building, the more likely it is that nature's tiny creatures will find spaces to proliferate. Removing entire ceilings and the A/C ducts in which the harm is concealed, steaming or fumigating surfaces and other places where these creatures hide, require special expertise, protective wear, and protection for the lungs. Several Government-owned buildings have been fully treated, and many more of the 57 properties which the employees of Government occupy will continue to require deep cleaning. In several departments, staff have been allowed to reduce their workdays to four hours per day, inconveniencing the public that is dependent upon the service offered. My Government pledges to fix those shortcomings, but recognizes that the battle for cleanliness is unrelenting.

NATIONAL HOUSING, CHAPA, AN UN-USED CAR PARK, SCHOOLS, PLAYGROUNDS

20. The promise to build affordable homes for families and to provide equity of a considerable amount to the new owners, in order to secure wealth, have engaged my Government over these past 10 years. More than 2,000 units have been constructed by the *National Housing and Urban Renewal Company* and the *Central Housing and Planning Authority* (CHAPA), and many more are forthcoming. The ambitious plans of these two agencies were set in motion in order to exceed the diminishing value of wooden houses—the standard to which many became accustomed—and to achieve generational sustainability.

21. The Booby Alley Modernization Project, a replacement housing upgrade from the warren of tiny wooden structures that once crowded the 1.5 acres of land in the Point, will be another shining example of social housing achievement by my Government. The Government of the Peoples' Republic of China has agreed to provide the necessary funding to construct the new homes and the infrastructure required to achieve the high standards that my Government has set. The two polyclinics built in Seatons and in Villa, by China, as gifts to the people of Antigua and Barbuda, demonstrate the very high standards that the teams have agreed will prevail. The buildings that are the University of the West Indies at Five Islands stand as a monument to the generosity of China, and the high standards that prevail when both sides insist.

22. Yet, the failures which my Government inherited, having attempted fixes, were virtually all successful with the exception of two—the unused car park at the top of High Street, and repairs to the abandoned parliament building. My Government purchased The Sunshine Hub for a small fraction of the cost of constructing the monstrosity on the City's green space more than 15 years ago. The Ministry of Works had engineers and other experts examine it to make recommendations for its rehabilitation. Then Covid-19 struck and resources were diverted to more pressing needs. As revenues begin their climb back to 2019 levels, my Government intends to transform that unfinished structure into a more useful place. The former parliament building, converted into the House of Culture in 2005, is also in the cards for completion. It was a gift from the Canadian people in 1981 and ought to be returned to its former glory, as soon as the resources allow.

23. Significant resources have been expended on refurbishing many of the schools that are preparing the next generation for future roles. The collaboration between the Ministry of Works and the Ministry of Education has been remarkable, thanks to the camaraderie that exists between the two Ministers, the determination by both to ensure successes, and the underlying philosophy of my Government to ready tomorrow's leaders. In addition to expansion and repairs, my Government celebrates the significant enlargement of the Harrison Center—the Antigua and Barbuda Institute of Continuing Education (ABICE)—that is able to increase its offerings to youth in search of skills development and, ultimately, higher earnings. The need for certification of tradesmen and women, moving between the O.E.C.S. and the CARICOM, requires an institution that can place the nationals of Antigua and Barbuda in a competitive position by showing training and skill levels.

The completion of the transformation of the Deluxe Cinema property into the Antigua and Barbuda Performing Arts Center, is one of those cultural investments that will enhance the possibilities of youth.

24. A necessary ingredient in the success of youth is found in the competition which sports usually generate. Schools sports are necessary in the production of Olympian athletes, professional cricketers and outstanding footballers. Repairs to the basketball courts, the football and cricket fields where they exist, and track and field infrastructure, have engaged my Government since 2014. Partnering with Cricket West Indies to purchase the Coolidge Cricket Grounds was a very wise decision that yielded tangible benefits. The work undertaken at YASCO to have it conform to international standards is commendable, and the Minister of Sports, in Cabinet, is to be congratulated for his unrelenting pursuit of this project. Major repairs are now underway at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium. Fine dust emanating from the cement factory not far away has interfered with the functioning of the display boards. Their replacement is not inexpensive.

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:

25. My Government joins in celebrating the superior performance of the Minister of Tourism whose promotional campaigns have catapulted Antigua and Barbuda's arrival numbers to one of highest growth, in the Caribbean. In fact, the Minister was declared by the CTO as the best performing Minister of Tourism in the region. Tourism's growth is not an accident, nor happenstance. Deliberate investments and vigorous pursuit of the growth objective resulted in more than 750,000 cruise passengers and more than 350,000 overnight tourists arriving in our destination, in one year. The construction of a fifth berth in the St. John's Harbour, and my Government's relations with Global Ports Holding, grew the numbers, especially so the homeporting that has been witnessed. The new rooms or keys that will become operational in Barbuda's PLH will cause the coffers to expand in the low density, super-luxury accommodations on Barbuda's shores, and more is yet to come. The replacement of the K-Club property with another high-end property, the doubling of the size of the NOBU Restaurant, plus the other hotel projects on the planning board for Barbuda, are sure to result in tourism's growth throughout the State. The new Halcyon Cove Hotel, the Morris Bay project, the expansion of the Carlisle Bay

Resort, the Sandals expansion, and others ensure that tourism will continue to drive growth in our economy for the foreseeable future.

26. The Citizenship by Investment Program (**C.I.P.**) has proven to be a significant non-tax-revenue contributor that provides resources which have gone towards payments to Social Security recipients, the C.B.H. Beautification Project and meeting many unexpected expenses. The C.I.P. demonstrates the wisdom of the City West Parliamentary Representative who introduced the idea to the Parliament, and the courage of the previous administration who turned it into law in 2013.

27.i. My Government has a very ambitious legislative agenda for the New Year. The new laws affecting our UWI Five Islands and the **A.I.** (artificial intelligence) agenda which Antigua and Barbuda will spearhead, are being crafted. There is an unfinished legislative agenda that will be pursued. Social Legislation intended to protect the elderly in the nursing homes that have proliferated, in order to meet a strong demand that has emerged as our population ages, will be presented to Parliament. Three Acts related to security will also be amended to make way for substantive reforms. The Police Force, the Fire Brigade, and His Majesty's Prison will have their nomenclature altered to reflect the modernized functions of these three institutions. The new laws will identify these institutions as: **The Police Service, The Fire and Rescue Service Department, and the Antigua and Barbuda Correction Facility.** They will become the new names by which those reformed institutions are thenceforth known. These changes are not cosmetic.

ii. A Forensic Services and Sciences Department will be introduced, since sending evidence abroad to be tested has proven to be expensive and takes an indeterminate length of time for results to be returned. That will end with the creation of this new Department.

Laws governing evidence are to be amended to allow those who use cell phones and landlines to further any criminal enterprise, and who can be detected, will thereafter be charged on the basis of the garnered facts. The Electronic Crimes Act is therefore to be amended further.

iii. The Act governing traffic and trucks will be amended to allow travel on the roadways by the vehicles bearing heavy loads at fixed times only, on weekdays; and, to pay appropriate fees for the upkeep and repairs of the roadways.

iv. Laws governing bankruptcy will also be amended to reflect the realities of a modern economy, and efforts by my Government to protect businesses while they recover from exogenous shocks, especially.

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:

27. I wish to conclude this statement by repeating the motto that will guide the nation during the coming year: ***Embracing the Legacy, Shaping the Future***. Far too often, as a people, many adult citizens of Antigua and Barbuda are inclined to share a view that the history of our own country need not be examined or recalled. All people everywhere are inclined to study their history and to recall those significant players and events that have helped to identify their unique place in the world. Antigua and Barbuda was founded for the purpose of growing agricultural products, especially sugarcane and cotton, and to export the raw product to the metropole for manufacturing value-added products. Agriculture will continue to play an important role, primarily as our country seeks to achieve food sovereignty, and farmers will continue to enjoy subsidies that will enable them to make a profit. As a maturing sovereign people, 42 years independent, history commands that we embrace the legacy which identifies the Antigua and Barbuda nation as a special people. That embrace will provide the spark required to ignite the shaping of our future.

“In this great future, we can’t forget our past,” Marcus Garvey recalled, and Caribbean artistes have reminded. As we plot our country’s future course, as we continue to build and to rebuild, as we move towards constructing an economic powerhouse, let us not forget our past. 2024 is a year of reflection and for looking forward.

29. May the God who guided our footsteps through 350 years of treacherous times, continue to provide wisdom and guidance to all who are in leadership positions at every level.

30. God bless you, God bless Antigua and Barbuda. I thank you.