



His Excellency Sir Rodney Williams, KCMG

Governor-General of Antigua and Barbuda

Delivers the Speech from the Throne

ENTREPRENEURIAL SOCIALISM:

THE FOUNDATION OF AN ECONOMIC POWERHOUSE

Monday, January 9, 2017
Parliament Building
Queen Elizabeth Highway
St. John's, ANTIGUA and BARBUDA

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

I bring each of you well-wishes for good health and prosperity during the New Year, and I pray God's blessings upon our entire nation in the year 2017. This is a year of great restoration; a year when the steel pillars of the economic powerhouse will soar aloft, welded to a sound foundation.

My Government regrets that Minister Eustace 'Teco' Lake, the Parliamentary Representative for St. John's Rural South, cannot be seated in this chamber today. The Director of the Mount St. John Medical Center reports that he is recovering and that the most talented medical personnel are applying their training to his case. Nevertheless, if it is necessary, my Government has already put plans in place to fly him to another hospital. We all pray for his speedy and total recovery.

My Government takes this opportunity to welcome to our Chambers this morning Dr. Al Kawari, Senior Minister of Qatar, who has graced us with his presence as he travels through the Caribbean. Qatar and Antigua and Barbuda are partners in development.

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:

2017 is the year which takes my Government into the second half of its first five-year term. The forecast is for robust economic growth, unprecedented levels of employment, and the continued lowering of taxes.

My Government has set about to create more wealth, more economic opportunities, a healthier population, easy access to job-training and to tertiary education, safer communities for women and children, and improved infrastructure everywhere. These elementary conditions, my Government acknowledges, are required to build and maintain our economic powerhouse in the Caribbean.

ENTREPRENEURIAL SOCIALISM:

My Government anticipates that, in 2017, the Antigua and Barbuda nation will witness increased investments, jobs in abundance, and continued lowering of taxes. My Government is operating with a new development paradigm guiding its policy-making. The development theory is labelled **entrepreneurial socialism**.

In this engineered approach to economic and social development, my Government takes the best of capitalist ideals, and the beautiful successes of socialism, and blend them into an innovative model that best fits the aspirations of the Antigua and Barbuda nation. My Government is intent upon restoring to the people of this great little country the lost years and the lost opportunities which another administration unwittingly took from them.

Demonstrative of **entrepreneurial socialism** at work is the decision by my Government to retain fifty-one percent ownership of the **West Indies Oil Company (WIOC)**, without increasing debt or drawing on the resources of the Treasury. While WIOC's management is left in the hands of the other part-owners from the private-sector, oversight is exercised by knowledgeable Board members, appointed by my Government, to safeguard and to grow its investment.

My Government is pleased to inform that it has recently received a **WIOC 2015 dividend payment** of **\$5,461,072** (five million, four hundred and sixty-one thousand and seventy-two dollars) from its WIOC investment. That is success! In April 2017, my Government expects to receive its 2016 dividend payment which is likely to be even larger.

A week following the WIOC dividend payment, **the State Insurance Company**—100% owned by the Government and people of Antigua and Barbuda—delivered a 2015 dividend cheque, payable to the Treasury, in the amount of **\$9,065,342** (nine million, sixty-five thousand, three hundred and forty-two dollars). That too is **entrepreneurial socialism** at work, my Government contends, and that is success. This innovative approach by my Government to wealth-accumulation and wealth re-distribution stands in stark contrast to the sell-off of state-owned assets that was actively pursued by a previous administration. **Privatization** is a failed policy, abandoned everywhere it was tried.

The State Insurance Company was intended to have been the very first of the Government-owned, highly-valued, and profitable assets that would have been transferred to private ownership. Had **not** the wise people of Antigua and Barbuda—the ultimate decision-makers in our democracy—changed their Government on June 12, 2014, a nine-million dollar 2015 dividend cheque from the State Insurance Company would have been deposited in private bank accounts and not my Government’s Treasury.

In order to further the successes of the **entrepreneurial socialism** model, my Government created the *National Housing Development and Urban Renewal Company*, with zero assets in June 2014. Today, less than three years later, the National Housing Company has assets in its accounts-receivables column valued at more than \$100,000,000 (one hundred million dollars) in lands, houses and unfinished dwelling places.

By building houses that will last more than 100 years, and by transferring these homes at cost to those who now rent others’ properties, my Government is seeking to ensure that low and moderate income-earners can own a significant asset which can be passed to succeeding generations. Therein lies a primary focus of my Government. It is a restorative approach to development. The object is to spread the wealth in order to bring balance to the skewed distribution of wealth, so common today; by restoring wealth to the neediest, those without will not be mired in generational poverty. It is a socialist ideal, whose roots are found in our Christian theology.

After the first of 500 houses built by National Housing are sold, the amount raised by the sale will be returned to National Housing for building yet another 500 homes. Further, whatever profit is realized from the sale of the homes in high-end locations—that is, those to be built on Marble Hill or Paynters or Royals—the profits will ultimately be placed in the same account as the profits paid-over by the State Insurance Company, the WIOC and the other profit-making investments undertaken by my Government.

NATIONAL ASSET MANAGEMENT COMPANY

In order to invest those accumulated profits wisely, my Government created The National Asset Management Company (NAMCO)—100% owned by the Government and people of Antigua and Barbuda. The NAMCO will marshal the

annual payouts of the profit-making enterprises owned by my Government, invest them in other limited-liability, capitalist enterprises, so that the wealth-creating machine is always growing. That is **entrepreneurial socialism** at work for the benefit of the people of Antigua and Barbuda.

My Government has determined that building a new, longer runway and air terminal on Barbuda is a high priority, and all indications are that a new Barbuda airport will be a profit center. Two new luxury hotels, condominiums and mansions are to be built on the south coast of Barbuda, beginning this year, at a cost eventually exceeding US\$500,000,000 (five hundred million dollars) jointly. The owners of these condos and luxury homes will fly their private jets into Barbuda; but, the existing runway at Codrington cannot accommodate aircraft that large. A new airport is coming to Barbuda at an estimated cost of US\$14,000,000 (fourteen million United States dollars).

My Government will commence the construction of a 6,000 linear-foot runway and an air terminal as soon as the Eastern Caribbean Civil Aviation Authority has authorized the plan. Advanced rental payments on the leased land for the DeJoria PLH project and the DiNero/Packer Paradise Found project will meet a substantial portion of building the new runway and terminal.

That new runway on Barbuda is expected to attract many private jets for the super-wealthy. Most important to my Government, however, is that the new Barbuda airport will attract landing fees and other taxes that will be credited to the Barbuda Council in order to meet operating expenses and to repay the investment cost. Profits will also be realized; those profits will be re-invested in Barbuda. That, my Government asserts, is **entrepreneurial socialism** at work, benefitting all those in Barbuda who care to participate.

The upshot of the new development model, as my Government sees it, is capital accumulation. Rather than dispose of valued assets, my Government has set about to build its assets base, so that more wealth is continuously made available for re-distribution to the sons and daughters of this great little nation. It is the theory of **entrepreneurial socialism** at work—a necessary precondition for building an economic powerhouse.

My Government encourages wealth-accumulation among its citizens for the primary purpose of ensuring that each generation need not start from zero, but can inherit and build upon generational legacies. Parents can bequeath valued assets to succeeding generations. Like the great Chinese people, my Government asserts that “wealth is good”. My Government intends to drive poverty from our shores.

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 year just ended was a magnificent performance-year for all of Antigua and Barbuda, my Government asserts. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) reports that in the year 2016, Antigua and Barbuda was the fastest-growing economy in the Caribbean, and the fourth fastest-growing in the Latin America and Caribbean region. It is an accomplishment which has come from diligence, energy, boldness, and a determination to succeed. Failure is not an option, is my Government’s creed.

Yet, all of the progress made in 2016 could have been un-done, had not my Government engineered a seamless solution to the impending banking crisis which loomed as a result of the imprudence which caused the ABIB Bank failure. The previous administration’s inaction exacerbated the crisis.

The Solution To The ABIB Crisis

The ABIB crisis began in 2007 and escalated by 2011 when the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank (ECCB) took over its management. The ECCB agreed that it needed greater autonomy and more authority if it was going to fix the ABIB challenge. The Banking Act 2015, adopted by the Parliament, gave the kind of power to the ECCB so that by December 1, 2015, the mechanisms were in place to declare the ABIB crisis fully addressed. The reaction of depositors was unpredictable.

Ten million dollars in cash were secured in order to satisfy any run on the bank. It did not happen. Depositors were sufficiently assured that they accepted the \$500,000 (five hundred thousand dollar) guarantee; those with amounts exceeding \$500,000 were guaranteed 2% annual interest on the balance, and a payout after 10 years. My Government has made good on that promise, paying interest to the depositors last month.

What began as a most embarrassing failure of an indigenous bank—which once brought every Antigua and Barbuda citizen great pride—ended successfully by the application of our creativity and our collective intelligence. My Government is exceptionally gratified by this singular achievement, one year later. The engineered solution saved our banking system from collapse.

My Government cannot be sure that the de-risking challenge, posed by the loss of correspondent banking, will not harm our banking system in 2017. Large banks in the USA, faced with hefty fines for single money-laundering offences, are quick to shed small accounts—especially of the indigenous banks—since the annual combined profits from transactions cannot compensate for the size of even a single fine. At a De-Risking Conference, held here in Antigua at the end of October 2016, the big banks stayed away. The proposed solutions had to be conveyed by writing.

Another De-Risking Conference is to be held in Washington later this year. My Government intends to participate fully and to trumpet the cause of small jurisdictions that stand in mortal danger, if our banks lose their correspondent relations in the USA. Like Haiti after its 1804 Slave Revolution, the wholesale loss of correspondent banking would wreck our economy by impeding our ability to conduct financial transactions across borders.

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:

When my Government took the reins of power on June 12, 2014, households were terribly scared of the criminals, who undermined faith in governance by their frequent invasions of homes with masks and guns. By providing the Royal Police Force with the tools required, that challenge has been frontally addressed. My Government expresses its thanks to the Royal Police Force, the Antigua and Barbuda Defence Force, and the ONDCP (Organization for National Drug Control and Money-Laundering Policy) for their expert pursuit of lawbreakers.

The challenges continue to face us. Two weeks ago, a criminal shot a visiting British subject in the head during a robbery. The young man was flown to Guadeloupe and then back to the U.K. where brain surgeons are available. We

express our sorrow over this event. However, the people of Old Road and of all Antigua and Barbuda pledge their full support to finding the perpetrator of this heinous crime, and bringing him to justice.

On that same night, two weeks ago, a criminal also shot a man lying in bed, at Golden Grove, and that victim has died. Our expressions of sympathy go out to his wife and family. My Government will never relent until dangerous criminals, carrying illegal firearms, are locked away, making our homes and our streets safer for all.

My Government takes this opportunity to express its gratefulness to the ONDCP for its swift action to prevent further wrongdoing, by those who wished to utilize one of our country's offshore banks for illicit purposes. In July 2015, or more than 18 months ago, the ONDCP acted to halt the use of the Meini Bank for illicit purposes in collaboration with the Brazilian authorities. Law enforcement there were certain that the Meini Bank was involved in a bribery scandal, stretching into several countries, across three continents.

The ONDCP acted immediately upon notice, in July 2015, by suspending the activities of the Meini Bank and dispatching materials requested to Brazil, while seeking court authorization. My Government is pleased to inform that the ONDCP acted as the law commands.

The ONDCP is expected in 2017 to confiscate illegally-obtained funds, to seize illicit drugs, and to arrest many criminals, as it did in 2016. The ONDCP is a worthy institution, very well-led.

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:

My Government reminds that in June 2014, when administrations were changed by the decision of the Antigua and Barbuda people, the Antigua Public Utilities Authority (APUA) was bankrupt. It owed more than \$140,000,000 (one hundred and forty million dollars) in unpaid obligations to its several creditors.

The APUA owed WIOC \$80,000,000 for fuel provided; it owed \$40,000,000 (forty million dollars) to the Antigua Power Company for electricity supplied, which APUA then sold to its customers; it owed more than \$22,000,000 (twenty-two million dollars) to Sembcorp, the potable water provider. APUA also defaulted on the loan to the Chinese for the Wadadli Power Plant. APUA was therefore bankrupt in 2014, my Government discovered.

Since June 2014, or in 30 months, the WIOC debt has been eliminated; the APC debt has been negotiated away; and, the Sembcorp debt is no more. In fact, the APUA now owns the Sembcorp Reverse Osmosis Plant. The inability to meet its obligations up until 2014 also meant that APUA undertook very little maintenance work.

APUA is now changing the 69KV line that delivered electricity from the plants to the grid for distribution to various sub-stations around the island. My Government thanks the Cuban Government for sharing its experts with us, in order to accomplish this task in as short a period of time as is possible. APUA apologizes to its consumers for the interruption in the power supply from time-to-time. When the replacement of the line is complete, in a few weeks, the inconvenient interruptions will be of the past.

My Government reports that there were no electricity meters in the storeroom when the new Minister was appointed in 2014. More than 3,000 meters have been installed in the past months; hundreds are in the storeroom, and more meters have been ordered. Many other deficiencies at APUA have been cured, my Government reports.

Broken water pipes have also posed a challenge, especially because they undermine road surfaces. When broken pipes are repaired, and the covering soil has been replaced in such a manner that the road surface is a danger to the long life of vehicles, then improvement in planning is required. My Government promises better coordination between APUA and the Ministry of Public Works, in 2017, to address this shortcoming.

It is not lost on my Government that continuous water supply is a challenge which was inherited from a previous administration. A severe drought, lasting more than four years and counting, has meant that supplies of potable water must come

increasingly from reverse osmosis plants. My Government has more than doubled the output of water produced by reverse osmosis plants, since 2014.

Two more reverse osmosis plants will be coming on-stream before mid-year 2017. A two-million-gallon per day plant has already been ordered and parts have already arrived in Antigua. Before June 2017, it will be adding 2,000,000 (two million) gallons of potable water daily to our network of plants and pumps, bringing us closer to the 8,000,000 (eight million) gallons required each day to satisfy demand throughout Antigua.

Another reverse osmosis plant, gifted to my Government by the Japanese, will be constructed very close to the Bethesda/Potworks Dam area. It will provide more than 40,000 (forty thousand) gallons of water daily, principally to our farmers in that breadbasket area. My Government expresses its thanks to Japan.

Everyone acknowledges that steady supplies of electricity and water are absolutely required in order to make Antigua and Barbuda a successful 21st century state and an economic powerhouse. Many more people are coming to the same conclusion about Internet services. A successful, 21st century state requires fast and reliable Internet service, at reasonable prices. In order to turn Antigua and Barbuda into the economic powerhouse of the Caribbean, all Internet providers must offer more megabits of computing power for reasonably low prices. APUA succeeded in doing just that in December 2016. APUA will be offering more attractive Internet packages in 2017.

APUA has also purchased 14,000 LED street lights that are to be installed during 2017. The lights will lower the consumption of fossil-fuel energy and provide communities with a greater sense of security after nightfall. My Government expresses its thanks to the People's Republic of China for the donation of 2,000 solar street-lights. The street-lights have already begun to be placed primarily in communities, so that light can be continually provided in the streets when darkness falls, and especially when storms or bad weather require APUA to turn off the electricity supply. Everybody is concerned with security that can be improved with lights.

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 is everybody's business, the billboards all over Antigua remind. For my Government, the reminder is not a slogan only, it is a truism that has captured the effort which goes into making tourism—our economic staple—produce results for the Antigua and Barbuda economy or, more specifically, its people.

My Government takes great pride in knowing that Caribbean Journal's 2016 Caribbean Travel Awards named Antigua and Barbuda's Tourism Minister as "**The Caribbean Tourism Minister of the Year.**" The publication also named our Tourism Director as "**The Caribbean Tourism Director of the Year.**" In 2016, the World Travel Awards named Antigua and Barbuda as "**The Caribbean's Most Romantic Destination.**"

These accolades are won as a consequence of creative and unrelenting work by all the men and women in the industry who give of themselves without surcease, in order to achieve success. My Government congratulates the officials, the staff, and all those who interact with business partners and the visitors, as we all contribute to making our destination a first-class experience every time.

My Government reports that tourism arrivals from the USA, Italy, and the Caribbean region have shown increases in 2016. Cruise passengers, and stay-over visitors arriving by air, increased significantly in 2016. A total of 678,000 cruise passengers arrived here in 2016, and that figure will grow significantly in 2017, as the fifth pier is completed in order to welcome the largest of the cruise-liners that now sail the seas—the Oasis Class.

On December 2, 2016, a Quantum Class cruise ship—the Anthem of the Seas—was able to dock at our Heritage Quay Port because my Government spent \$81,000,000 (eighty-one million dollars) to dredge the harbour, to remove 75,000 cubic meters of material, to extend the Heritage Quay Pier by more than 700 feet, and to ready St. John's to receive more than 5,000 visitors from this mega cruise ship. More than 13,000 cruise passengers arrived Antigua on that December day. It was the largest number of visitors arriving on any one day, in our country's history.

The Antigua Port Authority, the institution ultimately responsible for all seaports, can take great pride in its achievements during 2016. It is now a profit center, rather than the mendicant that poor management caused it to become after 2004. The Port reports a 37% increase in cargo arriving at the Deepwater Harbour, and a payout to its staff for arrears owed them. The Board, its Chairman and the Port Manager are to be congratulated for their sterling leadership. The Port staff has been most cooperative and helpful.

My Government expresses its thanks to the People's Republic of China and the China ExIm Bank for a loan of ¥600,000,000 (six hundred million Remnimbis) that will be spent on renovation and expansion of the Port at Rat Island beginning in 2017. China has become one of our most important development partners.

My Government reports that an expansion of the Yachting sector is taking place, as is the increase in the number of registered yachts for the 2017 Sailing Week— **the 50th Anniversary of the Antigua Sailing Week**. Seventy-three yachts have been registered thus far in December 2016, as opposed to 30 registered yachts in December 2015. This 50th anniversary year of Sailing Week promises to be more exciting than ever, my Government believes, generating more revenues and more opportunities for nationals than in any previous year.

In 2017, a new Antigua to Bermuda sailing race will be held in May—the week following Antigua Sailing Week. My Government believes that this additional component will serve to extend the yachting season and will in turn cause an increase in spending by the vessels and their crews. Forty vessels are expected to participate in the inaugural race.

Tourism will continue to be the main driver of our economy for the foreseeable future, my Government believes. It is therefore necessary for the sector to grow so that the youth can find employment, and our tertiary-level educated sons and daughters can play leadership roles within the industry. The number of hotel rooms must continually increase, and the product has to be renewed with frequency in order for Antigua and Barbuda to remain competitive.

Several hotel projects will get started in 2017, creating thousands of jobs in construction, with the attendant economic spin-offs that follow in the wake of massive building projects. The Royalton Hotel at Dieppe Bay will create more than

400 construction jobs. The Valley Church Beach Resort will generate an equal number of construction jobs. The Callaloo Bay Resort and the Yida projects will bring more than one thousand new jobs to working families across the land. 2017 will be a very good year for new employment in the construction/tourism sector, with the consequent spin-offs, my Government asserts.

A new beer factory, rising like a Phoenix from the ashes of the Wadadli plant at Crabbs, has been resuscitated by our Emeritus Leader. More than 200 jobs will be created when the new brew is shipped to wholesalers and supermarkets around the state and the sub-region. The beer's new name has remained a secret and will be unveiled when all systems are in place for the first bottles to reach our shelves. There will be no groundbreaking or soft opening of this plant although work has begun.

The estimated growth in the economy is expected to surpass the 4.2% growth of 2016, taking the country past the 5% growth-ambition that my Government has set itself for 2017. This will not be growth fuelled by borrowing, as was the case in 2005 to 2007. Sustained growth in the Antigua and Barbuda economy will be generated by multiple new investments.

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:

While the employment picture will be exceedingly healthy in 2017, the physical health of our people requires special interventions. The vision of the Ministry is the attainment of good health and wellness for all who reside in Antigua and Barbuda. Working with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the Ministry of Health has developed a **National Strategic Plan for Health: 2016 to 2020**.

Non-communicable diseases—like diabetes, kidney failure and congestive heart failure—will take many lives prematurely, in 2017. In order to forestall that outcome, the Ministry has set a wellness agenda that aims to make all residents and citizens healthier. A Wellness Committee—made-up of technicians from the Ministry, experts from the Medical Benefits Scheme, from the Mount St. John

Medical Center and other statutory bodies—has been assigned the responsibility to coordinate and implement the Action Plan.

The major risk factors that pose a challenge to a healthy population include alcohol abuse, tobacco use, the intake of salty foods and sugary drinks in abundance, high-caloric food in excess, compounded by physical inactivity. These risk factors contribute significantly to high morbidity and high mortality rates across the country. The object of the wellness program of my Government is to discourage each of these habits, so that the population can be healthier, become ill less often, need fewer medicines, and will ultimately live longer quality lives.

My Government recognized that threats to the good health of the people of Antigua and Barbuda have also come from vector-borne parasites. The Zika virus, for example, followed the chikungunya virus, both carried by the *Aedes Egyptae* mosquito. My Government increased the budgetary allocation for vector control, intensified mosquito control activities, and eliminated duties and taxes on items used to control the breeding of mosquitoes. Twenty-five new Inspector positions were created and funded so that the program could be more vigorously pursued. The low rate of chikungunya and Zika infections attest to the program's success.

My Government is pleased to announce that the wait in the Emergency Room at the Mount St. John Medical Center (MSJMC) has been reduced to a range of 45 to 124 minutes. Several management techniques have been devised by the new hospital administrators that will increase efficiency in 2017. There is now a Functional Urgent Care Division of the Emergency Department at the MSJMC. It has been determined that 60% of the workload in the Emergency Department fall within this category. Nearly 33,000 patients were seen at the Emergency Department of the MSJMC in 2016; by categorizing the out-patients into groups, the administrators have discovered efficiencies that lend to shorter waiting times.

The Dialysis Care Unit of the MSJMC is expanding each year because of the increasing number of patients who suffer kidney failure. \$1,500,000 (one million five hundred thousand dollars) have been set aside from the Citizenship by Investment Program (CIP) to purchase additional equipment and supplies for the Unit. The annual cost of maintaining a dialysis patient is about \$75,000. My Government is pleased to announce that a private-sector organization has

pledged \$3,000,000 (three million dollars) for the expansion of the Unit. My Government expresses its sincerest thanks to the donor.

My Government also expresses its thanks to the People's Republic of China and to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela for the Bright Journey Program and the Miracle Mission Program. The generosity of these two Governments resulted in better vision for hundreds of residents of Antigua and Barbuda. The Ministry of Health is pleased with the results, as are the patients who had cataracts, pterygium, and other ailments that inhibited or prevented vision until the operations were undertaken. Many thanks.

The MSJMC now has an ophthalmologist on staff; she has seen hundreds of patients who could otherwise not afford to see an eye doctor. My Government is pleased to announce that 185 men and women, a week ago, received prescribed eye glasses to correct their vision, at no cost to them.

My Government is pleased to report that as the vision of its citizens improve, the visible environment is also being enhanced. Plastic bags that were freely distributed at supermarkets and easily discarded improperly have successfully been banned. Canvas bags were distributed in large numbers at no cost, to encourage the use of reusable alternatives. In 2017, the Ministry of Health and the Environment will move to ban Styrofoam cups and plates in order to reduce the levels of carcinogens that humans could possibly be ingesting.

My Government's stewardship of the Antigua and Barbuda environment has earned it sterling applause globally. Its civil servants have been highly lauded in many international fora for their work on global climate change, and other environmental challenges. My Government's pursuit of renewable energy, with the intention of achieving 20% green energy by 2020, is considered remarkable. Barbuda will become a 100% green-energy island in a few short years.

Given my Government's commitment to green energy, its determination to keep the physical environment pristine, its promise to turn discarded tires into useful road repair material, its pledge to make us healthier citizens, and to improve the delivery of health services, our country is fortunate to have leadership that matters at the helm of the Ministry of Health 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:

When the Government of the United Kingdom announced that it would provide Antigua and Barbuda with an indicative grant of £13.9 million Pounds Sterling for improvement of the country's infrastructure, there was no hesitation by my Government to select major roadways for upgrades by that grant.

It was anticipated that as many as five major roadways would have been repaired and a new highway built. That will not be. The resources simply cannot be stretched that thin. However, the two highways that are to be reconstructed, with the resources provided by the British grant, will be ultra-modern and superior. Additional funding will be provided in Budget 2017 in order to improve the quality of our roadways and our streets.

Just like our public spaces, the maintenance and upkeep of Government-owned or -occupied buildings are a responsibility of the Ministry of Works. The sewage challenge which undermined the health of workers in the High Court Building on Parliament Drive was successfully addressed. Following a fire at the Land Registry in the Ryan Building, that Government Department has found a somewhat permanent home on Lower High Street.

When several government-owned buildings fell into disrepair because of neglect, the Ministry of Public Works and the National Housing Team began collaborating in order to reverse the demise. The National Archives Building, the School Meals Building at Coolidge, and even the Old Administration Building at the foot of High and Long Streets, have all witnessed collaboration between these two functioning bodies.

The magnificent work which the National Housing team undertook, restoring the derelict Old Admin building, cannot go un-mentioned. The 1958 model building was constructed on piles by Antiguans; a significant sample of the architectural heritage of our city, it was scheduled for demolition in 2012 by the same body charged with preserving the uniqueness of the City of St. John's. My Government expresses its special thanks to a well-known taxi driver and the Emeritus Leader for pledging to do all that was required in order to save that building from destruction.

Following an investment of less than \$2,000,000 (two million dollars), the Old Administration Building is back. Its glory is on display. A building deemed as rubbish is now also valued at more than \$8,000,000 (eight million dollars). It now serves as the Ministry of Health Headquarters and is itself an attraction for residents and visitors alike, perched at the entrance to our city from the sea. My Government applauds the professionals at the Ministry of Works and Housing for their outstanding work; and, praises the National Housing for its flexibility and competence.

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:

Antigua and Barbuda did not medal at the 2016 Olympics, held in Brazil. That outcome was not as a result of the failure of our Olympians; rather, two of our best track-and-field athletes suffered injury and could not compete. My Government is determined to ensure that in 2020, in Japan, several additional athletes will be ready to out-perform their counterparts from around the world.

My Government therefore pledges to improve the YASCO Track, by acquiring the contiguous land required, to enable the construction of a conventional track that will be the very best in our sub-region. Training and intense competition will mark the preparation over the next four years so that Antigua and Barbuda can display the excellence for which our country has become known globally. Other playing fields in St. John's and throughout rural Antigua, and in Codrington, Barbuda, can expect improvements in 2017 as the commitment to excellence in sports is intensified.

My Government celebrates the selection of an Antiguan and Barbudan cricketer to the West Indies Senior team; he is the first in 10 years to reach this pinnacle. Excellence in cricket was never an accident here. Administrations since Sir Vere Cornwall Bird have secured large tracts of land for playing fields around the country; paid for lights and grounds men to maintain those fields; paid coaches and others to improve players' techniques; and often helped in the procurement of gear for games and teams.

My Government is certain that the televised new formats of the cricket game—played globally, but invented in Antigua—will open-up new possibilities for a new generation of players who are likely to emerge, as my Government increases investment in cricketers and cricket fields.

My Government has pledged to enter into a joint venture agreement with the West Indies Cricket Board to purchase the Sticky Wicket and the Stanford Cricket Field, certain that this partnership will yield significant benefits for the game and the state. The Antigua and Barbuda Cricket Academy, to be foundationed by the Four Sirs, will become a part of the University College of Antigua and Barbuda (University of the West Indies—Antigua Campus), turning out talent and treasure.

My Government intends to invest in the continued maintenance of the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium and the upgrade of the Antigua Recreation Grounds. The sporting infrastructure will receive significant injections of capital in order to ensure the continued availability of adequate first-class playing fields.

The outstanding competition which the country continues to witness in football is the result of unstinting support for this competitive sport, by all stakeholders. Whatever their internal disagreements and struggles, the administrators are great lovers of the sport. My Government encourages ambition without acrimony. The art of leadership, my Government believes, is expressed in creativity and genius, not just public debate.

My Government is very aware that the Antigua Recreation Grounds are a multi-purpose venue. Primary among its secondary uses is the annual Carnival. The year 2017 will mark the 60th Anniversary of the Antigua Summer Festival. It is my Government's intention to make Carnival 2017 the biggest and most spectacular Carnival ever. The planning has begun, the financial resources required will be put aside, and the artistes are expected to set and to achieve very high goals.

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 Ministry of Social Transformation, within my Government, has been set many of the most far-reaching objectives of any Ministry, intended to have a lasting and

transformative effect on the Antigua and Barbuda society in 2017 and beyond. The Ministry's mandate, after all, is to transform our island-state into a gentler, kinder place that seeks to smooth the rough edges of our competitive economic system.

My Government fears that the heady pursuit of profit might otherwise leave the most vulnerable of the population stuck in a lopsided distribution system. The heart of the **entrepreneurial socialism** model is, therefore, expressed by the compassionately ambitious agenda assigned to the Ministry of Social Transformation.

The Home Advancement Program for the Indigent (HAPI), for example, is my Government's new approach to helping indigent owners of houses that are badly in need of repair beyond the owners' capability. When low incomes would forever prevent a homeowner from fixing her dilapidated home, my Government will provide a hand. A grant of EC\$10,000 will be awarded to successful applicants, and the National Housing will apply that sum to home-repair which its workers will undertake.

The Zero Hunger Program will target the most vulnerable, single-headed households with children living in the home, in order to ensure that no-one goes hungry. It will also help pregnant and lactating mothers who are in need of supplements and medication, in order to ensure that infants can grow-up healthy. The primary object is to eliminate malnutrition from the land and thereby increase the probability of healthy newborns, well-nourished infants and elderly.

My Government has also acquired **two new Para-Transit buses for the transport of the wheel-chair bound elderly and ill**. The South Korean Government is to be thanked for its usual generosity. The gifted buses have not been assigned to any constituency, as in the past, but to the Ministry, for use by anyone in need, regardless of their party membership.

My Government, working with the Embassy of the United States and the US Southern Command, has begun to demolish the old headquarters building of **the National Office of Disaster Services (NODS)**. A new building, costing more than \$800,000, is to replace it by mid-year 2017. The US Government is thanked for its contribution. The NODS collaborates with the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency before or following natural disasters in the region. It will

also continue to work with several Ministries and the Antigua and Barbuda Defence Force to secure lives, livelihoods and properties during national disasters. Although spared by hurricanes in 2016, no-one knows what 2017 holds. The global climate change phenomenon is real and dangerous.

The Youth Affairs Division is one of the successes of the Ministry of Social Transformation which will help to drive many young people towards achieving qualifications that propel. Scores of young people have begun taking classes and have applied to sit for the CXC Exams. Others are joining the queue, hoping to do the same.

My Government has assigned the Ministry of Social Transformation a variety of tasks that will cause the appointed Minister to continue to be exceedingly busy during the next twelve months. **The Boys Training School, the Training Division, the Community Development Division, the Directorate of Gender Affairs, the Substance Abuse Prevention Division, the UNICEF-Funded Integrated Social Protection Systems Project, and the Financial Empowerment Center** will enrich the social efforts to maximize resources and to contribute to making Antigua and Barbuda a gentler, more caring and intelligent state, operating within a compassionate framework labelled **entrepreneurial socialism**.

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:

My Government has an equally ambitious agenda for its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Immigration. First, more than 5,000 new citizens of Antigua and Barbuda were sworn-in during the latter part of 2015 and in 2016 combined, as a result of the 2015 amnesty law adopted by my Government.

Within a year after taking office, my Government prompted the Parliament to eliminate the artificial gaps created by a previous administration. The motive of that previous administration, as discerned by my Government, was to seek to limit the number of men and women who could qualify to register to vote; if one could not register, then one could not cast a vote in general elections.

The inherent unfairness of mandating that a second or a third seven-year period of residency had to begin again because of a gap, despite taking the residents'

money for the time that had passed, struck my Government as being unjust. Congratulations to those who took advantage of the amnesty and became new citizens of this great little country. Ours is a cosmopolitan state with people from more than 100 different countries living peacefully together.

My Government will go further in 2017. Instead of requiring work permits for all workers who are citizens of other states, a system of residency permits will be issued instead. My Government need not remind the people of Antigua and Barbuda that many more than 100,000 Antiguan and Barbudan and their descendants reside in—and are citizens of—other countries. These are the people of the diaspora who continue to contribute to our development.

My Government expresses its historic thanks to the host countries of the diaspora. The United States has long opened its arms to our people, rescuing generations of our families from the grip of abject poverty. Canada is also one of the places in which our people have historically settled, and started new lives. To these countries my Government also says “thanks”. Our relations with the UK has always been more complicated. Yet, the people of Antigua and Barbuda welcomed a Royal figure here two months ago, without ambivalence.

As the economic powerhouse we have set out to build increases new opportunities to achieve, many nationals who would choose to live abroad will decide to return after study or after garnering significant work experience or accumulating wealth. My Government welcomes returning nationals with open arms.

My Government expresses its thanks to the several Governments that have extended scholarships to the youth of Antigua and Barbuda. The People’s Republic of China, the Republic of Cuba, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the Federated States of Mexico, the Kingdom of Morocco, the Russian Federation are among the several states that welcome our students annually. These countries’ contribution to our island-country development is not lost on us. We express our heartfelt thanks.

One of the greatest challenges facing my country’s diplomacy is the resistance which Antigua and Barbuda has encountered from its great friend and neighbour, the USA, in the outstanding WTO matter. Having successfully prosecuted our case at the World Trade Organization more than 12 years ago, and having been

awarded US\$21,000,000 (twenty-one million United States dollars) annually by the world body, getting the USA to make good on its obligations has been impossible. For more than 30 months, my Government has tried to get the USA to come to a meaningful settlement.

It was my Government's view that a settlement would have been achieved before the Obama Administration demitted office on January 20, 2017. That date will soon pass. Consequently, it is the intention of my Government to apply the remedies permitted by the WTO. It is my Government's intention to proceed to Parliament to adopt legislation consistent with the WTO ruling, allowing Antigua and Barbuda to nullify US copyright protections and to benefit from so doing.

The USA is a very powerful and wealthy state, capable of inflicting harm. My Government believes that the new administration that is about to take office will recognize the lawfulness and justness of our actions and will quickly settle the differences that have kept our negotiators apart. The USA would not turn to intimidation and revenge.

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:

Two administrations have tried taking a draft *Telecommunication Bill* to Parliament, and have withdrawn the same after a first reading, in order to allow more time for the stakeholders to consult. At this point, my Government has concluded all consultations and will move forward, taking the many proposals into account. *The Telecommunications Bill 2017* will be adopted in this Session of Parliament, now commencing. It will bring greater clarity and competition to telecommunications, while lowering prices and increasing speeds to all subscribers.

Barbuda will not be left out of this equation, especially since two major hotels and other smaller properties will be constructed there, commencing in 2017. A sub-sea fiber-optic cable will be laid between both islands, allowing residents on either side of the water divide to enjoy equal speed and quality, at reasonable prices.

While planning for the Barbuda expansion, eight different Government Departments will have their operations and records digitized. They are to include: The Mount St. John Medical Center; the Civil Registries at the Court House (to include the Birth, Marriage and Death records); the Prison Records; the Intellectual Property Business Records; the Establishment Division; the Treasury Department; the Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda; and the Financial Services Regulatory Commission. These Government entities will all be digitized in 2017, my Government has decided.

Antigua and Barbuda is determined to improve on its “Ease of Doing Business” scorecard, and can only begin to match our counterparts in the British Virgin Islands, for example, if the records and the operations of Government become digitized. At great expense to the taxpayers of Antigua and Barbuda, the Ministry of Information, Broadcasting, Telecommunications and Information Technology has done a remarkable job at modernizing the systems that deliver greater efficiencies, my Government believes. Congratulations.

My Government will further address the systems at the Inland Revenue Department, so that daily cash flows and other data can be quickly farmed. The Immigration and Citizenship Departments will also be digitized in 2017. The e-visa system is already functional within the Immigration Department. The Customs and Excise Department has begun to utilize the Asycuda system, which was devised by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). The renewal of drivers’ licenses can be undertaken on-line, so that the Antigua and Barbuda Transport Board is already a functionally-digital operation. The Treasury in Barbuda and the Barbuda Council are also to become digitized, as soon as the trainers and the equipment become available.

In order to become an economic powerhouse, the old systems must surely be discarded and the computerized systems that will dominate in the 21st Century must be applied immediately. That measurement has to be applied to the state media, the Antigua and Barbuda Broadcasting Stations (ABS).

My Government considers 2016 as a high-performance year for the ABS systems—Television, Radio and Internet. There was a vast improvement in local broadcast content. That was made possible by the purchase of new equipment.

The last piece of equipment required for high definition television is being installed. ABS-TV will be no less clear than television beamed from North America.

My Government intends to make ABS a prime source for news; already, it is first in social media, in Antigua and Barbuda, and reaches a very mixed audience globally and locally.

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

One of the concealed successes of Agriculture in Antigua and Barbuda has been the farmers' ability to satisfy the egg market, almost 100%. Antigua and Barbuda is virtually self-sufficient in egg production. That is remarkable given the increasing number of tourists, the growing human population, and the many uses to which eggs are put in food production.

Poultry farming for chicken parts is still to reach acceptable levels. Reducing the import bill for chicken parts by 10%, over the next two years, is now the reasonable goal set by the chicken farmers in conjunction with the Ministry. Several proposals to establish chicken farms for import substitution have turned out to be land-grab attempts. My Government has not been duped by those who sought huge tracts of land with access to our oceanfront, under the pretext that they were considering growing chickens for local consumption and export. Chicken farming for import substitution remains small scale.

Aquaponics, however, is catching-on in Antigua, my Government has found. Several very skilled and well-trained entrepreneurs have begun raising fish for consumption, and have created a symbiotic system that allows the nutrient-rich water from the fish pens to be utilized for the growing of certain cash crops. Further, in order to lower the cost of operation, at least one clever farmer has added a solar energy plant to drive the pumps circulating the oxygenated water during the day; the farm relies on APUA's electricity during the nights when the solar plant is without the sun's energy, but the pumps must continue to work.

These entrepreneurs are very successful at selling their fish and food crops. Their systems are very scientific and very attractive to youthful farmers. They have demonstrated that large open-field farming can be replaced for the production of

some crops by the aquaponics farm, and with lower labour costs. Every effort is being made by my Government to encourage more of these farms that are clearly the wave of the future.

Peanuts, however, must continue to be grown in open fields. Several acres of land have been set aside in Barbuda for the growing of the giant Barbuda peanut. That Barbuda export was once harvested for consumption in St. Kitts, Nevis, Montserrat, and Antigua. My Government believes that the knowledge and expertise still exist among Barbudans, and that newly applied scientific methods such as drip irrigation can resuscitate this particular crop. Farmers in Barbuda are encouraged to give consideration to growing their giant peanuts for export.

My Government continues to address the challenge posed by the giant African snail; it is a voracious devourer of farmers' green leafy crops. Thousands of pounds of snail bait have recently reached our shores and are being distributed through the Central Marketing Corporation (CMC). Additionally, my Government has learned that a bounty system in Barbados successfully reduced the giant snail population. My Government will collaborate with farmers, utilizing every system that works, in order to bring relief from this pest which is equally harmful to farmers as are praedial thieves.

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:

My Government has demonstrated its commitment to the development of youth by following a continuum which dates back 62 years, to 1955. In January 1955, the Princess Margaret School was opened. It was intended to be a primary school. However, through stealth and the careful involvement of very dedicated educators, 22 students were selected to prepare for the Higher School exams—then offered by two private secondary schools only, in Antigua.

The success story of the Princess Margaret School has been re-told by several historians because it marked a turning point in the provision of post-primary education to a youthful population, eager to learn; and, it reflected the hopes and aspirations of their low-income parents, very anxious to see their children

succeed. Two of four Antigua and Barbuda Prime Ministers have emerged from that glorious institution called the Princess Margaret School.

Like the turning point provided by the Princess Margaret School, my Government intends to introduce a tertiary, baccalaureate degree-issuing university in Antigua and Barbuda.

The University College of Antigua and Barbuda—more properly, the University of the West Indies (Antigua Campus)—will become a reality by September 2018. The campus is already established at Five Islands and two Schools have already been provided-for at that location.

The School of Education and the School of Nursing are its first occupants. My Government will bring to Parliament *The University Act 2017*, as a prerequisite to the establishment of a UWI Campus. The law will cover land-transfer, terms of service for professors consistent with UWI standards, salary scales and other emoluments that will apply to a university, and the lawful recognition of the University itself.

As the University begins to come to life, five secondary schools have had their school plants enlarged. The Princess Margaret School, the Antigua Girls High School, the Clare Hall Secondary School, the Jennings Secondary School and the All Saints Secondary School together can seat 1,000 more students than before the new classrooms were constructed.

My Government inherited the student-overcrowding challenge and determined to bring a solution to it. The Cabinet of Antigua and Barbuda brought together the stakeholders in order to determine the best fit for these schools. Since parents continue to express a preference for the schools with the highest levels of passes, and their teachers require more administrative space than is currently available at these plants, my Government determined that more is better. The devised solution was expansion of the school plants.

Later this year, a new secondary school will begin construction at Tomlinson's. The details of that plant will shortly be fully shared. Meantime, my Government intends to intensify repairs at other government schools in order to improve the environment for better learning.

The Villa Primary School and the Cedar Grove Primary School will receive upgrades with a grant from the United Arab Emirates. We thank the United Arab Emirates for its contribution and our United Nations Ambassador for arranging this outcome.

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:

Having been repositioned to advance the rebuilding of our beloved nation in 2016, the Antigua and Barbuda people have agreed that a new model for excellence in economic growth has to be pursued. My Government has chosen to define a paradigm which it labels “**entrepreneurial socialism.**” It is the foundation upon which can be constructed an economic powerhouse of enormous promise.

My Government is very much aware that for these ambitions to be realized, enormous quantities of new investment capital must flow into the most productive sectors of the economy. A healthy population, well trained and willing to work, must also stand at the ready. Further, a significant number of that population must be trained at the university level. No country without a university can expect to sustain growth, because increased wealth is premised on the application of new knowledge to systems of wealth-creation, and the ability of many intelligent people to manipulate those systems generating the wealth.

As countries develop, they will face the challenge of anti-social behaviour from small pockets of individuals who will seek quick means to enriching themselves at others’ expense. Antigua and Barbuda is no exception. The easy availability of firearms will mean that the criminals will rely upon lethal force in order to compel compliance with their unlawful commands. An effective law enforcement machine is required to maintain order and to remove the disruptive elements, especially the violent thugs, from among those who obey the laws of the land.

Antigua and Barbuda, my Government believes, is at an important juncture in its take-off. Every hand to the plough, every shoulder to the wheel; jobs, jobs, jobs. There is no human detritus in this model. The willingness to work hard and smart, and to create new opportunities for the population to exploit, is the function of

the leaders. My Government pledges to continue to work very hard and intelligently. My Government will not relent until success is achieved. My Government will overcome every challenge, exceed every hurdle and, with God's help, make Antigua and Barbuda **the economic powerhouse of the Caribbean.**

May God bless you all. I thank you.