



His Excellency Sir Rodney Williams, KCMG

Governor-General of Antigua and Barbuda

Delivers the Speech from the Throne

ENLARGING OUR HUMAN CAPITAL:

MOVING TOWARDS THE ECONOMIC POWERHOUSE

Thursday, January 16, 2020
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:

1. I wish everyone a healthy and prosperous New Year, and pray that 2020 will be a year of increasing job-creation and un-stoppable economic growth. While no-one can predict with certainty what any New Year will yield, continued growth in our economy has historically resulted in an improved Antigua and Barbuda—which we all seek.

2. My Government is of the view that the year just ended witnessed four excellent quarters for Antigua and Barbuda. At the end of the year, the economy grew by 6.0%. Only Guyana, with new-found oil reserves, had greater growth. Sustainable growth of the Antigua and Barbuda economy is evident from the annual data since 2014. Our country was also very fortunate, since there were no hurricanes in 2019 to disrupt the functioning of our tourism product; there occurred very few heinous crimes to frighten our people and our visitors; and, thousands of new jobs were created to keep our young workers employed and productive. The year 2019 was indeed a good year.

3. On September 1st 2019, our citizens witnessed the opening of the University of the West Indies Fourth Landed Campus. This was the greatest achievement of the new administration, re-elected on March 21, 2018. Congratulations to all of Antigua and Barbuda for this milestone! The U.W.I. Five Islands Campus follows seven decades of a thriving indigenous university that will continue its march towards enlarging the human capital required to make Antigua and Barbuda an Economic Powerhouse. My Government expresses thanks to the People's Republic of China for several meaningful contributions towards this drive. Harvard University will also join the effort. Our painful history is yielding dividends, thanks to the smartest and most determined leaders from our country and our region.

4. The successful effort of the Ministry of Finance to pay December salaries, wages and emoluments on December 13th, 2019, is to be applauded. Yet, five weeks have passed since those payments were made, and another two weeks remain before salaries, wages and emoluments will again be received. It was my Government's expectation that public servants would have spent wisely during the Christmas holidays, and, therefore, the heads of households would still have financial resources available to meet their many continuing January obligations. Knowing

the wisdom of the women of Antigua and Barbuda—the best economists which history produced—my Government is satisfied that all prevailing conditions informed their purchases during the joyous season just ended, and there is still *oil in the lamps* for January 2020.

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5. The West Indies Oil Company, 51% owned by the Government and people of Antigua and Barbuda, continues to generate profits and dividends. The annual dividends have been more than sufficient to surpass the obligation incurred for the company's purchase. My Government is aiming at similar participation in other enterprises in other sectors of the economy so that, in due course, revenues will come from multiple sources other than taxes. The overarching object is to keep taxes low, increase the availability of investment capital, and stop the Treasury from experiencing annual shortfalls during slow summer months.

6. My Government is articulating a new economic paradigm which it labels: "**Empowerment Capitalism**". Antigua and Barbuda's 25% participation in the Eastern Caribbean Amalgamated Bank (ECAB) is intended to ensure that profits flowing from that enterprise can be usefully employed to augment the coffers of the government's investment machine. Profits realized from investments are to be effectively deployed, rather than immediately consumed. **The National Asset Management Company (NAMCO)** is my Government's sovereign wealth fund. By partnering with several capitalist enterprises, annual profits can be shared, proportionate with ownership, and the yield further invested in other enterprises. Corporate taxes, ABST and property taxes will continue to be collected from these enterprises, benefitting the Inland Revenue Department. Ours is a winning formula and the NAMCO Chairman and his team are to be congratulated for doing justice to this new approach, aimed at solving a structural challenge which all previous administrations faced. My Government is seeking to correct this continuous imbalance and reminds that failure is NOT an option.

7. My Government has also successfully fulfilled a very ambitious legislative agenda in the year just ended, including amendments to existing legislation. Success was possible in large part because the number of drafters in the Ministry has been

increased in order to meet the higher demand of changing circumstances. Among the most innovative pieces of legislation adopted are: *The Social Protection Act*, *The Environmental Protection and Management Act*, *The Electronic Crimes (Amendment) Act*, and *The Bail Act*. Several laws have been amended to bring them into modernity. *The Marriage Act*, in particular, moves the lawful age of marriage from 15 to 18 years; it is among the laws passed which signal to the international community that protection of children is paramount here. *The Telecommunications Bill* has not yet had its second nor third readings, despite the ambitions of my Government to enact the provisions into law. There are differences within that are still being ironed out.

8. My Government takes this opportunity to congratulate the Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda for its sterling service to the nation during the past year. Although three men and women were murdered in 2019, my Government believes that the social fabric which binds us allows for the peaceful pursuit of solutions to our disagreements—except when passions flare. Having sufficient jobs to discourage idleness, and permitting the growth of four trees in one’s backyard, has taken the lawlessness out of peddling marijuana and the violent confrontations that sometimes resulted from the illicit trade. Scores of youth have also been saved from having criminal records, by the de-criminalization of possession of 15 grams. My Government’s multi-pronged approach to reducing youth criminality has yielded good results. The Attorney General is congratulated for his superb leadership and stewardship.

9. Another of the police arms of my Government is the ONDCP—the Office for National Drug and Money Laundering Control Policy. These are challenging and critical times for the ONDCP as it leads efforts to bring Antigua and Barbuda into compliance with international standards. The frequent amendments to legislation and to policies governing the financial services sector, require continuous improvements in ONDCP’s analytical, investigative and supervisory capacities. The drive requires the reshaping of internal and external operating mechanisms. With the cooperation and collaboration of ONDCP’s partners, my Government will continue to steer the course to maintain the country’s financial integrity in the fight against money laundering and the financing of terrorism.

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10. My Government has done its best to provide all the potable water required to keep households, hotels, businesses and standpipes flowing with the precious substance. The rains have been intermittent such that even Potworks Dam, capable of storing 1,200,000,000 (one billion two hundred million) gallons of surface water, is almost dry. Investments in desalinating plants, exceeding EC\$80 million dollars, have been made thus far and more is yet to come. However, the challenge of leakage occurs. My Government has directed APUA to access US\$37 million dollars to replace the decades-old, broken cast-iron pipes that are principally under the streets of commercial St. John's. One can only imagine the inconvenience which that replacement exercise will cause; hence, it is to be planned and executed with precision and all deliberate speed. The Minister of Public Utilities has the greatest challenge of his career on hand, and history assures my Government that he will do a masterful job.

11. The challenge of LIAT continues to engage my Government, and will be with us for the foreseeable future. Although my Government has borrowed to invest in LIAT's restructuring, the transfer of a significant portion of shares from the largest shareholder government has not occurred, and probably will not occur. Another approach is to initiate a strategy aimed at making LIAT bigger and better—not smaller or less significant. Antigua and Barbuda would have betrayed history if this generation of leaders did not do all in its power to ensure that LIAT can continue to serve the region. All countries served by LIAT ought to make an investment in this regional body; the best course of action is to share the burden equitably. My Government intends to enlarge the carrier, make it profitable, and save those 700 LIAT jobs. Antigua and Barbuda borrowed \$17 million dollars from the ALBA Bank that will go towards restructuring LIAT, in order to strengthen our regional carrier; the loan amount is not intended to reduce any country's debt, but to provide operating capital to the airline so that it can grow. My Government intends to change the fortunes of LIAT.

12. My Government takes great pride in the turnaround which the people of Antigua and Barbuda have witnessed at the Mount St. John Medical Center, since 2014. Having invested nearly US\$50 million dollars in new diagnostic and other

hospital equipment; and, having added doctors specializing in urology, neurology, and emergency care to the team; and, having attracted visiting expert-surgeons to undertake complex operations on eyes and kidneys; and, having further planned to undertake operations on malfunctioning hearts, the lone public hospital is enjoying very high approval-ratings from the population.

13. Superb leadership at the Ministerial and Directorship levels have assured us of a new and higher level of treatment at the hospital, which will soon be called: "*The Sir Lester Bird – Mount St. John Medical Center.*" No-one endured more criticism and opprobrium for having the foresight, the prescience, to construct the purpose-built hospital on the Mount, than Sir Lester Bird. Institutions that bear the names of their originators will forever cause the nation to examine our history, my Government believes; and, *The Sir Lester Bird - Mount St. John Medical Center* will stand as such a monument in history.

14. A private hospital and a clinic are planned to commence construction this New Year. The five-acre property on which stands the old Adelin Clinic, on Fort Road, will see the construction of a five-storied private hospital that will focus upon utilizing cutting-edge technology to treat chronic diseases. On Friars Hill Road, the attentive automobile passengers may have noticed that a Stem Cell Research Center building has already been constructed, and millions of dollars invested. It is my Government's intention to make Antigua and Barbuda be known globally as a research center for this emerging technology, with the expectation of attracting outstanding scientists and doctors to our shores. This movement forward will generate interest and income and will help to define our country as an Economic Powerhouse. My Government continues to make significant investments in health and wellness, which include transforming the Medical Benefits Scheme into a National Health Insurance Plan, and promoting campaigns on prevention of illnesses. The Ministry is focusing upon lifestyle changes, proposing significant modifications to diet, encouraging more physical activity, avoiding the use of cigarettes and alcohol, and abandoning sugary drinks.

15. My Government has also spent substantial amounts to ensure that the indigent and the vulnerable-elderly can be properly cared-for, housed and fed. Several elderly citizens and needy families who are unable to provide for self, have been granted stipends by the Board of Guardians. The physically challenged and the differently-abled are also receiving the attention of my Government. The elderly

are also given adequate attention. My Government is constructing a new Fiennes Institute. Working alongside a performing non-governmental organization—called *Adopt-A-Family Foundation*—my Government has built several homes for those who would continue to live in squalid conditions, were it not for the intervention. Several private sector enterprises have contributed building materials, while labour has been gladly volunteered by non-violent inmates of Her Majesty’s Prison. Many properties have been built and repaired for the indigent and the elderly under the HAPI Program. The Minister with Responsibility for Social Transformation has been the guiding hand in this undertaking, and is to be applauded.

16. Another of the programmes emanating from the Social Transformation Ministry of my Government has been “*The Second Chance Programme.*” More than 1,600 adults have decided to take advantage of the opportunity in 2019/2020 to give themselves a second chance to take coursework that will lead to passes in CXC exams. Their ambitions demonstrate that it is never too late to seek certification and to improve one’s intellect. Adults who have entered into the workforce and recognize that certification will lead to improvements, in earnings and responsibilities, have decided to enter into this programme. My Government congratulates those who manage this *Second Chance Program*, and applauds the thousands who have decided to make the best use of this cost-free resource since its inception.

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17. The excellent management of our nation’s bilateral and multi-lateral relations, by our Minister of Foreign Affairs, is to be celebrated. The project to construct 100 new homes on Barbuda, funded by the European Union, is scheduled to commence in a few weeks; the object is to provide homes to Barbudan families who cannot afford to build their own, since Hurricane Irma completely destroyed the dwelling places of many. The People’s Republic of China has also agreed to build 100 homes on Barbuda as part of a larger project to build 300 homes in the nation on a grant basis. The Dominican Republic plans to construct a school on Barbuda, as soon as the bidding process is complete in Santo Domingo. The Minister of Foreign Affairs has transformed the power of sovereignty into material advantages, as any wise sage would have done. He deserves our applause.

18. One small advantage which Antigua and Barbuda enjoys under the CARICOM Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas is found in Article 164. The Article was designed to promote the development of manufacturing industries in eight CARICOM members, designated ***The Lesser Developed Countries (LDCs)***. The six sovereign States of the OECS, Haiti and Belize are designated LDCs. On 9th October, 2019, Cabinet, at the urging of the Minister of Trade, decided on the phased implementation of Article 164 list of products to include paints. As a result, Harris Holdings (Antigua) Ltd. will be establishing a paint manufacturing plant at Coolidge, with all rights and privileges afforded the firm by the provision of the CARICOM Treaty, which became effective two weeks ago on 1st January, 2020. Harris Paints will build an environmentally-friendly, state-of-the-art manufacturing plant that embraces the very latest innovations. The plant will be a full-fledged manufacturing facility, receiving raw materials from around the world and transforming them into finished products that are canned and labelled on site. Harris Paints will manufacture, starting in March 2020, approximately 60,000 gallons of water-based, architecturally-decorative paint; that amount will rise to 200,000 gallons annually by 2025. Congratulations!

19. Our congratulations also go out to the Minister of Information and Technology who has brought to bear on the execution of his duties, the many years he spent within a private technology firm. His experience, both with technological innovations and human resource management, has made him a very valuable actor within the administration, my Government asserts. The negotiations with the several private firms to yield space on the 850 megahertz spectrum, so that APUA-INET can earn more from its operation of certain services, resulted in the withdrawal of litigation from the courts and has led to settlement of the disagreement by negotiation. My Government has always preferred to settle the standoff among the three players, though it remained firm in its determination to redistribute the 850 megahertz band equitably. When an Authority is established to enforce regulations, under the planned Telecomms Act, consumers can expect even better and more competitive services from all three providers.

20. My Government is very pleased with the superior viewing programmes provided by the nation's broadcast station, and continues to expect further improvements as time moves forward. Although additional resources are required to further enrich the output, ABS has been utilizing its scarce resources well, giving a quality product far in excess of its provisioning.

21. When my Government received a bill for several million dollars from a single security firm for providing human security at our 43 public school plants, it was time to make substantial changes. Resources allocated to educating youth ought not to be spent on security in quantities such that the object of education is diminished. The technological revolution allows private and public sector organizations to decrease security costs, while increasing the absolute security which can be provided to ensure the safety of buildings and their physical contents. Consequently, collaboration between our technological gurus and the Ministry of Education allows my Government to secure schools without paying unbearable amounts to firms to provide human security. The continuous monitoring and quick response teams will be able to deter criminals and vandals, and to provide evidence to the courts in gaining convictions. The stain on our nation's character is very evident when the institutions which our forebears held sacrosanct—our schools and our churches—have become targets for thieves who set out to steal valuable equipment.

22. Equally important as school security is school performance. Students in Antigua and Barbuda are no longer competing with their CXC/CARICOM counterparts, or with students in the wider English-speaking world. Our students' competitors, my Government believes, are global. Our country is required to produce graduates who can compete with others from much larger, better-endowed, and materially richer states all around the world. The use of upgraded technology, including e-books, tablets, the Internet, whiteboards, distance learning and innovative classroom technologies are very well understood by our educators, their administrators, and the Minister with responsibility for directing changes in education. In the pursuit of smarter graduates, requiring more relevant and purposeful learning, no-one has a better handle, my Government believes, than the Minister of Education. He has earned his spurs.

23. My Government's commitment to providing more scholarships to those deserving youth, who are pursuing tertiary education, remains as strong as ever. More than \$25 million dollars are earmarked for scholarships each year. This past September 2019, resource flows were not as readily forthcoming and so payments of some scholarship awards were delayed. My Government is informed that many of those youthful scholars who did not receive their allotments will have had that cured by this time. Bear in mind that ***The Board of Education*** has collected more than \$550 million dollars since its inception 25 years ago, and has spent more than

\$150 million dollars on scholarships. ***The Citizenship by Investment Program*** has raised more than \$700 million dollars since 2013, and the provision of student scholarships has been among the expenditures of the CIP. Several friendly states have enlarged our human capital stock by providing scholarships to hundreds of Antigua and Barbuda youth over the decade. For assisting with our development ambitions, my Government thanks profusely the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Cuba.

24. While we continue to celebrate the planting of the Fourth Landed Campus of the University of the West Indies at Five Islands, my Government is fully aware that our high school graduates must arrive at the gates of the University fully prepared to begin absorbing new lessons. Five Secondary Schools were expanded to accommodate more than 1,000 additional students; and, the Sir Novel Richards Academy was added to house incremental amounts that will climb to more than seven hundred students in five years. More classrooms require more teachers and more counsellors. My Government continues to invest in teachers. The re-classification has resulted in higher earnings, and the refurbishment of school plants has led to better-equipped staffrooms and administrative facilities. Much remains to be done and my Government is addressing the shortcomings by making more resources available for upgrading staff facilities. Singapore became an economic powerhouse in Asia by investing heavily in education and educators. My Government has learned that lesson well and will not relent until complete success is achieved because: failure is NOT an option.

25. My Government is very determined to make agriculture play a more important role by putting hundreds of fertile but fallow acres of land to use, producing food items. The People's Republic of China has provided my Government with a number of scientists and agricultural experts, and millions of dollars in equipment, in order to assist us to make our parched shrub lands productive. More than 300 farmers have received training from the experts. China has made several of its deserts bloom, and is one of the largest producers of food in the world. The Minister of Agriculture is determined to supplement the current population of farmers by attracting youthful and entrepreneurial men and women to the agricultural sector; the offer of training and the introduction of newer techniques that will modernize farming, will act as a magnet to draw those who would wish to join the noble profession of farming. Chinese experts are transferring skills by teaching our farmers to turn un-used agricultural land into productive fields of food.

Greenhouses, drip-irrigation, hydroponics, and all those scientific measures that will significantly increase our nation's agricultural output, form the basis of the Ministry's optimistic outlook.

26. The production of freshwater fish has increased in 2019, over 2018 production figures; and, the catch of lobsters and conch has also increased, on account of the conservation measures put in place by very able technicians within the Ministry. The export of lobsters has also increased, as has domestic consumption of the crustaceans. In March 2020, Antigua and Barbuda will host an important regional conference that will look: ***"Towards a Sustainable and Resilient Caribbean Fisheries and Blue Economy"***. It is my Government's expectation that many new proposals will emerge to the benefit of the fisheries sector. In the production of chicken eggs, my Government reports that no import licences were granted for the importation of chicken eggs in 2019. That was not the case in previous years. Antigua and Barbuda has become self-sufficient in poultry egg production in 2019, thanks to the poultry farmers and the expert advice from the Ministry.

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27. One of the most-challenged Ministries of my Government is *The Ministry of Works*. It has the responsibility for the upkeep of 400 miles of paved roads. All automobile owners demand roads without potholes, because cars are expensive. In fact, the second-costliest capital investment of any adult, second only to ownership of a dwelling place, is ownership of an automobile. My Government's policy of relaxing the import duties and other taxes on imported vehicles, caused thousands of previously-owned cars to be purchased from Japan, for the enjoyment of buyers. National events now attract thousands of participants, because the availability of the automobile has allowed families the freedom to attend and to remain until late at night, no longer requiring public transport to get them to their homes. Although that waiver-of-tax policy is being tightened, those used automobiles now daily utilize the 400 miles of roadways in our country. Two major highways are being rehabilitated and will be fully completed after Easter 2020. Three additional highways will be upgraded next, while secondary roads in Old Road, Swetes, Buckleys, Montrula, Golden Grove Extension and other villages, will have the attention of my Government in the months ahead. *The Ministry of*

Works will have responsibility for these costly undertakings, and my Government is certain that the no-nonsense Minister will achieve my Government's goals. Better roads are coming. The Ministry has also turned several quarries into profit-making enterprises, following the purchase of expensive crushers and trucks. My Government is seeking to turn every reasonable opportunity into profit, utilizing the guiding principles of Empowerment Capitalism. The overriding object is to ensure that the Treasury need not be as severely burdened as before.

28. When my Government offers Crown lands for sale at concessionary prices, it is seeking to further the empowerment of its people by encouraging construction of homes or enterprises. There can be no wiser policy for any administration to adopt than to spur economic activity leading to construction jobs and multiple opportunities for economic success. *The Ministry of Housing Lands and Urban Renewal* has been pursuing such a policy and its record of success, under the guidance of the intelligent and capable Minister, wins great applause. My Government has agreed to set aside several parcels of crown land for small contractors willing to finance, construct and sell homes. The vacant lands, no plot larger than ten acres, will sell at \$3.00 per square foot to the small contractors, who will be compelled to submit their development plans to the Development Control Authority for approval, prior to the commencement of construction. Roads, drains and sidewalks, running water and electricity, will have to be configured into each development's public spaces before DCA approval is provided. This policy of selling land at concessionary prices was announced a few weeks ago, and the response has been good. These are the identical conditions which ***The National Housing and Urban Renewal Corporation*** has been granted. My Government is therefore introducing a model to compete with its own company.

29. The essence of success, my Government believes, is competition which is rules-based. In sports, cultural expression and the arts, competition has always resulted in forging a high quality of performance among the very best. The people of Antigua and Barbuda admire their best cultural artistes, their best cricketers, their best athletes, their best musicians because the expression of excellence is embraced and applauded, appreciated and revered in our country. Admiration, not envy, is our people's code.

My Government has agreed to host CARIFESTA 21 despite a hefty price tag, because the display of our country's excellence and the Caribbean's brilliance cannot be limited only to the national space. Caribbean civilization has emerged from

hundreds of years of enslavement, oppression and degradation. As an inventive people, we have created more Nobel Prize Winners, more Fulbright and Rhodes scholars, more youthful and enduring entertainers, than any population of so limited a size. We are a great people!

This greatness is reflected in the choices brought forward by the Minister, tasked with the responsibility to ensure exposure of talent and by those within the Ministry whose responsibility is to organize a plethora of national festivals. When few competed for West Indies Women's Games, Antigua and Barbuda stepped forward and provided the cheering crowds and public applause that spurred the women to success. When our London High Commissioner identified raw talent and proposed several visits of the Kanneh-Mason family to their ancestral homeland, no-one would have thought that a 20 year-old would be so highly applauded by his country of birth. Talent is not the reserve of citizens of large countries, or wealthy countries, or populous countries. Talent is the result of hard work, practice and competition, and Antigua and Barbuda will always prevail because of these elements planted deep within its cultural psyche. The West Indies Cricket Teams now have four nationals of our island-country on its roster, if one includes the female cricketer. Achieving greatness is our mantra.

30. The former Deluxe Cinema is to be retrofitted so that the National Youth Symphony Orchestra will have a permanent home. The venue will also provide for talent to be developed and nurtured, and for greatness to be expressed because superior talent has come from our genes and from places to practice and to display talent. Although our National Olympic Team has yet to medal, the year 2020 will provide another opportunity for excellence to be put on display at the global games. The YASCO Track and Field will be shortly completed, and the Antigua Recreation Grounds will be made the permanent home for soccer. My Government is determined to ensure that our future will mark this nation as great in the fields which require competition, excellence, and drive.

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31. Three weeks ago, the air arrivals to our shores in one calendar year topped 300,000 overnight visitors. That was reason to applaud for it signaled the visionary success which our fore-parents initiated with the passage of the *August 1952*

Hotels Aid Ordinance law, upon which several administrations and my Government have built and grown this economy. Last year, the economy grew by more than 6.0%; in 2020, the projected growth will be in excess of 7.5%.

The paltry projection of a misinformed IMF cannot stand-up to the reality of our robust growth, managed by our very smart people. Tourism continues to be the major engine of growth; it grew by 13% in 2019, and will exceed that target in 2020. My Government will continue to ensure that resources to finance marketing, and smart people to undertake the marketing, remain in sufficient supply. The Minister of Tourism has been a dynamic figure in these expressions and my Government continues to applaud him and the technicians who work diligently to achieve outstandingly.

32. The cruise tourism sector will continue to grow. In 2014, just about 600,000 visitors reached our shores on cruise liners. In 2019, that figure stood at 750,000—an increase of 25% in five years. The aim is to exceed one million passengers with the superb partnership of Global Ports Holding (GPH) in less than five years. That partner has made significant contributions to the University of the West Indies Fourth Landed Campus; has eliminated a debt to a bank which is more than 20 years old; and has begun making investments that will exceed \$100 million dollars. The Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines will develop Fort James into an entertainment center, with an investment exceeding \$270 million dollars that will enable that 25-acre site to compete with Nelson’s Dockyard. Fort James has history, beauty and accessibility on its side, and there will be a burst of new economic activity during the construction phase and on the completion of the project. My Government is clearly of the view that Antigua and Barbuda will rightfully take its place at the helm of the tourism competitors in the Eastern Caribbean, once again.

33. New hotels will be constructed across the state, including in Barbuda, in order to double the number of rooms in a very short period. The PLH Project involves an investment of US\$250 million dollars. The Paradise Found Project will also expend US\$250 million dollars in a low density hotel project. The new airport outside of Codrington, capable of allowing private jets to land in Barbuda, will cost more than \$25 million dollars upon completion. Tourism in Barbuda will cause a real private sector to grow there and ease the burden on the Barbuda Council to provide employment.

Renewable energy projects on Barbuda will make it the first green-energy island in the Caribbean. Solar, wind power, and storage batteries will mark the giant leap

forward in Barbuda and shortly in Antigua. My Government pledged 20% renewable energy by 2020, and the administration intends to keep that promise.

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34. The future of Antigua and Barbuda is bright, both in this New Year and beyond, my Government believes. The economy is performing well. My Government has acted to ensure that no-one is left behind as Antigua and Barbuda ascends the great ladder to a glorious future. The strength of our nation is measured by the weakest link in this chain of sacrifice and achievement, and my Government, steeped in the ideals of the labour movement of 1939, has stuck to its roots. The people of Antigua and Barbuda understand the objectives and the methods by which high achievement has been made a reality.

35. Our most productive sector is being driven by new investments, and construction is booming. Sand, cement and steel are being gobbled-up by the contractors, and the cityscape is being altered by symbols of growth and success. Any young man who wishes to be employed can find a job. Many are becoming entrepreneurs, creating jobs for others. Multiplying employment opportunities in the private sector has been an overarching goal, and it has been a success.

As the new decade dawns, ***Vision 2023 and Beyond*** is fast becoming the reality for which our people yearn. We will build our nation together, enlarge our human capital, and make our country the best it can be for the good of all.

A Happy, Healthy and Prosperous New Year to one and all.

I thank you.