

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

INTRODUCTION

Madam President and Members of the Senate:

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

The representatives of the House of Assembly have been elected; and the members of the Senate have been selected.

You have met and have chosen your respective presiding officers.

Parliament is now fully constituted and so the new term of this great Parliament can begin.

It is now my privilege and my duty to outline my Government's programme for this Parliamentary term.

NATIONAL OBJECTIVES

My Government undertakes the business of this new parliamentary session ever mindful of the outstanding contributions made to the building of this great nation by our predecessors and deeply aware of the responsibility which the people have entrusted to their representatives.

This parliamentary term commences in the midst of the worst economic and financial crisis the world has witnessed in well-nigh one hundred years, and at a time of increased awareness of the need to source energy other than from fossil fuels, and so green the world economy; amid growing concerns about the deleterious effects of climate change and against the background of continuing efforts to attain global peace and security.

My Government, fully cognisant of the foregoing will work tirelessly to mitigate the negative effects of these challenges and will maintain its commitment to the full development of our society in preparation for the task ahead. This parliamentary term envisions a Barbados that is socially balanced, economically viable, environmentally sound and characterised by good governance.

As a small island developing state Barbados will continue to make its voice heard in the international arena and continue its leadership efforts in the region.

The details of my Government's programme will be discussed in more detail in the Estimates of Expenditure later this month.

EDUCATION

My Government firmly believes that a country which fails to invest in its youth is a country without a future. Barbados' future is certainly secure in this regard and our education system and its achievements to date are renowned. Not resting on our laurels, my Government will move with haste to create an education system that also fosters a spirit of enterprise and entrepreneurship, and one which produces persons with the skills and knowledge for wealth creation, resulting in a more competitive job market and effective living.

My Government, during this term, will undertake the construction of at least two new secondary schools and reduce the roll of secondary schools to a more manageable figure of 800 to 850 students. At the same time, it will continue to develop programmes for the "At Risk Students" and for the differently-able in our society.

My Government will establish additional campuses of the Barbados Community College and the Samuel Jackman Prescod Polytechnic in the northern and eastern parishes to cater to those students who otherwise, would have difficulty travelling to St. Michael.

My Government will grant an income tax deduction of up to \$5,000 on the interest on loans sourced from the Student's Revolving Loan Fund and will provide as well, an income tax deduction of \$5,000 maximum per year for those pursuing tertiary education/training at an overseas internationally recognized institution.

HEALTH

My Government, fully cognisant of the salient role of health care to our nation will accelerate its efforts to restore the Queen Elizabeth Hospital as the premier health care institution in the Caribbean and will construct a new hospital.

It will restructure the management system for polyclinics and open the new, fully functioning Polyclinic in St. John – The David Thompson Health and Social Service Complex.

My Government will continue to pursue an analytical, people-centered and solutions-oriented approach to the challenges in the health sector. Renewed attention will be placed on chronic non-communicable diseases, and efforts will continue apace to implement programmes to strengthen the quality and delivery of primary health care, as well as emphasising preventative health care.

My Government will pay especial attention to the elderly, a category of persons that have made an indelible contribution to this country over the years in many areas. Amongst other things, it will subsidize home modifications to cater to the safety of the elderly through a new programme the “EASE” – the Enhancement for Active Seniors Programme. Each household with an elderly member will be entitled to a tax credit of up to \$2,000 for approved safety modification.

YOUTH

My Government will accelerate implementation of the National Youth Policy which is aimed at the development of our young people. Under this policy, my Government will create employment opportunities for the youth through entrepreneurship and other empowerment strategies.

It will develop Youth Innovation Centres, establish a Youth Development Board, launch, immediately, a Youth in Agriculture Programme, and establish a voluntary National Youth Service Programme.

SPORTS

The role of sporting activities to a society cannot be overstated. They provide positive channels for youthful energy, discipline, opportunities for building self-esteem and self-confidence and sharpening social skills, as well as the attainment of lucrative careers. With the sudden rise in chronic non-communicable diseases in Barbados, it is imperative that the linkage be made between sporting activities and the pursuit of a healthy life-style.

My Government will restructure the National Sports Council to allow it to implement a new National Sports Strategy that will focus on a “Team Barbados” Concept. It will also implement the National Sports Council’s

five year Strategic Plan which includes provision for transforming sports into a full-fledged industry.

A Sports Hall of Fame will also be established to honour our great sportsmen and women.

CULTURE

Cultural industries have been identified as potential growth industries to assist in the diversification of our economy.

My Government will seek to have the Cultural Industries Bill enacted, establish a National Art Gallery and a Film and Digital Media Commission, restore the Daphne Joseph Hackett Theatre and pursue the acquisition of the Globe Cinema to transform it into a Centre for the Creative Arts.

Barbados, very conscious and proud of its rich heritage, was elated to be honoured in the last year when Bridgetown and its Garrison achieved UNESCO inscription as a World Heritage Site. My Government, buoyed by this honour, will now pursue the inscription of Barbados' industrial heritage – “The Story of Sugar” and “The Scotland District”.

BUILDING STRONGER FAMILIES

Considering that families are the building blocks of the nation, the work begun in the previous parliamentary term will continue to further cement this institution, with special regard for children and the differently able.

My Government, with respect to income tax claims, will increase the child allowance to \$2,000 per child per year, and the number of children that can be claimed against taxable income to three. In addition, it will introduce an allowance of \$2,000 per year for dependent parents.

My Government, keenly interested in the welfare and development of children will accelerate its already aggressive and highly successful efforts towards the development of a full-fledged children's village at Nightengale, Black Rock, St. Michael; renovate and expand the Day Care Facilities at Haynesville, John Beckles, Marion Hall and Sayers Court and extend Nurseries where possible. In addition, it will construct an ultra-modern Day Care Facility at Fontabelle, St. Michael, to provide immediate relief, particularly to single mothers, who work within the Bridgetown area.

My Government will provide tax deduction up to a limit of \$500 to subsidise the cost of membership in a registered physical fitness facility, remove the tax on medication for persons who are diabetic, have hypertension or other chronic non-communicable diseases, and remove the taxes on aids and equipment for the physically disabled.

GENDER EQUALITY THROUGH WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

As Barbados continues to make great strides toward true gender equity, we recognise women's empowerment as a catalyst in this quest.

My Government will therefore actively pursue gender equity through policy-making and programming that target women and men at risk.

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

My Government, recognizing the value and the contribution of the Constituency Councils to good governance and community development, will strengthen these institutions to assist them in meeting their objectives more efficiently.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

My Government, ever conscious that the workers' movement influences and is influenced by changing economic and social trends, is committed to ensuring that workers are treated with respect. It will therefore provide for the voluntary recognition of Trade Unions, or by a threshold of 30% of the workforce of an establishment, determined by survey. It will also protect workers from termination for strike action.

Noting the critical role played by the Social Partnership to the conduct of industrial relations in Barbados since its establishment, my Government will establish a permanent structure for the Social Partnership with a linking mechanism to facilitate the integration of our society and economy.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

An economically viable Barbados, operating in a challenging global market place will have to depend, in a serious way, on a diversified, entrepreneurial economy.

My Government's approach therefore in this area will be three-pronged, involving a disciplined macro-economic framework, a focus on reducing the fiscal deficit and diversifying the economy.

The prolonged economic recession has impacted negatively on our major revenue and foreign exchange earning sector – tourism – making it difficult to reduce the debt and the consequential debt service, and at the same time, meet the commitment to our country's social development.

My Government will implement strategies that will expand real growth in the economy, increase Government revenues, reduce the tax share of Gross Domestic Product, and reduce the level of the country's indebtedness to an acceptable level.

The centre piece of Barbados' economic strategy will be the creation of a Renewable Energy Revolution which will enhance the competitiveness of the productive sectors by reducing energy costs, reducing the fuel import bill, creating new jobs and helping to lower the cost of living.

My Government will therefore immediately prepare a Renewable Energy Bill to bring into effect the relevant budgetary measures of 2012, and establish a \$150 million "Hotel Refurbishment, Energy Efficiency and Food Production Fund" within the National Insurance Scheme Investment portfolio. This Fund will be mandated to provide equity financing for investments related to energy efficiency, – especially electricity generation from renewable energy sources – in the Agriculture, Manufacturing and Tourism sectors.

Embracing the spirit of entrepreneurship and productivity is key to the economic transformation and growth that Barbados needs at this time. Government's aim is to achieve a productivity growth of 2% to 3% per year. Challenging as this task may be, it is imperative that we rise to the challenge to preserve and improve as necessary our quality of life.

It is critical that Barbadians be protected from the ravages of the global recession and that the peace and stability of the Barbadian society be maintained. My Government reasserts its commitment to meeting the targets of the Medium Term Fiscal Strategy and is prepared to make the necessary adjustment to public expenditure to realise those targets.

My Government will therefore:-

- Aggressively pursue new Foreign Exchange Earnings growth strategies as the most sustainable means of reducing the fiscal deficit and national debt;
- Reduce the levels of Transfers and Subsidies in line with the targets of the Medium Term Fiscal Strategy;
- Undertake an extensive programme of tax reform including VAT, Customs Duties and Trade Taxes;
- Work with the social partners and negotiate with Trade Unions, in particular, to craft a policy to keep wage increases in line with productivity improvements;
- Introduce performance-based pay in consultation with workers' representatives;
- Immediately embark on an extensive renewable energy electricity generation programme to reduce the operational costs of Government Departments and Statutory Corporations by spearheading the use of renewable energy for electricity generation;
- Reduce the operational costs of Government Departments and Statutory Corporations by conducting an assessment of the operational processes at each major Government Department/Institution to determine how they can benefit from an infusion of appropriate technology;
- Reduce the operational costs of Government Ministries, Departments and Statutory Corporations by merging Departments and entities that have similar remits or are serving the same interests;
- Carry out Value for Money Audits for the ten Departments or programmes with the largest expenditure;
- Upgrade Government procurement systems to improve efficiency and reduce costs;

- Subject each Ministry and each Department to a Zero Based Budgeting process once every five years;
- Ensure that the Annual Budgets for Statutory Boards are prepared on a Zero Budget basis once every three years;
- Insist that all projects likely to cost more than \$5 million be subject to a complete capital investment plan and analysis before commencement.

TECHNOLOGY

To further drive economic growth and social development, it is important that Barbados be at the cutting edge of the new information technology.

My Government will reduce the cost of internet and broadband access to households by providing an income tax deduction of up to \$2,000 for domestic internet and broadband and encourage the development of e-Commerce by offering businesses income tax concessions with respect to the establishment and operation of e-Commerce websites.

AGRICULTURE

Barbados' high food import bill remains of deep concern.

My Government will therefore set a target of 10% increase in local food production during the next five years, and of at least 25% in the reduction of the food import bill. The Ministry of Agriculture will be modernized to take advantage of the latest technology with a view to enhancing productivity in that sector and, at the same time make it attractive to our young persons.

My Government will introduce and enforce modern praedial larceny legislation to help farmers protect their production. It will also partner with the insurance industry to develop a crop insurance scheme to protect farmer's investment in agricultural production.

My Government will also increase fiscal support for investment in agriculture technologies aimed at augmenting production; increase fiscal support to national farmers' organisations to facilitate higher yield in agricultural production for the domestic and export markets and restructure the Land Lease programme to attract more young people to agriculture.

With respect to sugar cane, my Government will implement the Cane Industry Restructuring Project to bring the sugar cane industry to at least a commercial break-even position.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Against a background where the costs of this country's oil imports continue to rise astronomically, with concomitant drain on our foreign exchange, it is imperative that firm steps be taken to reduce this financial burden and allow such funds to be allocated to other sectors of the economy.

My Government will therefore put systems in place to reduce the cost of imported energy by \$150 million over the next five years. It will reduce CO₂ emissions and reliance on fossil fuels and cut electricity consumption by significant amounts. It will also amend the legislation relating to the provision of electricity to allow for the disaggregation of electricity services, where specific rates or fees are established for generation, transmission and distribution.

My Government will also establish a Stakeholder Forum with all major financial and banking institutions with the objective of implementing a "Rapid Finance" initiative to fast track financing for homeowners seeking to install renewable energy electricity generation systems.

My Government will continue working with our CARICOM neighbour Trinidad and Tobago for the construction of a natural gas pipeline linking Trinidad and Tobago to Barbados.

TOURISM

Tourism continues to be the lifeblood of the Barbados economy, and while tourist arrivals and tourist expenditure have been adversely affected by the prolonged recession, this country still remains a highly desirable tourist destination. We need, however, to enhance our competitiveness in this area through upgrading and refurbishing existing properties, adding brand name hotels and diversifying more of our tourism source markets. In addition, we have to capitalize on our World Heritage Site designation of Bridgetown and its Garrison.

My Government, in pursuit of the foregoing, will provide immediately, the sum of a US\$20 million investment for the retrofitting of air-conditioning and lighting systems in the hotel sector as a means of reducing energy costs.

It will complete the restructuring of the Barbados Tourism Authority, complete the construction of the Pierhead Marina, construct a new cruise pier to separate cruise ships from cargo vessel operations, and aggressively seek to attract visitors from the growing economies in South East Asia, China, Latin America and Northern Europe.

My Government will also facilitate arrangements to have Almond Beach Village rebuilt to provide permanent employment for some 1000 persons.

INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

Despite the ongoing global recession and the increased levels of international competition, Barbados has been able to maintain its competitive position and its envied reputation in the international financial services arena.

My Government will therefore put in place, as a matter of urgency, mechanisms to improve business facilitation.

It will also continue its work in expanding the network of double taxation and bilateral investment treaties.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

As a small economy, Barbados is challenged to develop indigenous manufacturing businesses that are globally competitive. The contribution of manufacturing to our GDP needs to be significantly increased to provide much needed foreign exchange.

My Government will therefore support the establishment of Research and Development activities geared towards the promotion of innovation.

WATER RESOURCES

The quality of public infrastructure in Barbados has been a major factor in the high standard of living enjoyed by Barbadians. Our water infrastructure assets are aging and in need of upgrading and extending. Efforts are in train to take the appropriate action.

My Government will expand water supply in the South and East of the island, in response to the growing demands occasioned by expanding housing developments.

It will undertake the West Coast Sewerage Project and also complete connections to the Bridgetown and South Coast systems.

HOUSING

The programme of Housing Every Last Person and the focus on housing solutions for low and low to middle income wage earners will be continued.

My Government, cognisant of the important role of a thriving middle class to the continued socio-economic development of Barbados, will implement a programme that facilitates access to house lots of approximately 5,000 sq. ft. at a cost of \$15.00 per sq. ft.

It will increase the threshold for assessing land tax from \$190,000.00 to \$250, 000.00.

In addition, it will offer fiscal incentives to promote the development of Building Societies to facilitate home ownership by the middle class.

My Government will continue to focus on reducing the backlog of housing solutions for low-to-middle income wage earners, partner with the private sector to construct houses for middle income families and individuals, continue to promote the construction of starter homes and continue to maximize land use through the construction of additional high rise apartment buildings.

TRANSPORTATION

A reliable and safe public passenger system has been and continues to be critical to the economic and social development of Barbados.

My Government will reduce the operating costs of the Transport Board by sourcing electric and hybrid buses which can be powered from renewable sources. It will establish two new terminals at Fairchild Street and at Seaview, Cheapside in Bridgetown.

My Government will implement monitoring technology for the speedy detection of motorists who violate traffic laws through the use of public roads without insurance of vehicles or payment of road taxes, and will enact legislation to manage noise levels emanating from private vehicles whether through music, defective mechanical systems or specially designed mufflers to raise noise levels.

THE PUBLIC SERVICE

The Public Service reflects a rich repository of a mix of knowledge, skills and talents and its performance rates it among the best in the Caribbean.

Recognizing the importance of the Public Service to this Nation, and in an effort to further enhance its capabilities, my Government will establish a college for public servants which will employ a blended approach to learning.

It will also provide for the recruitment of a Public Sector Reform Manager, and for the benchmarking of Public Sector Performance and Annual awards to outstanding public servants.

SECURITY

Given the challenges that face a small, open society such as Barbados, we must be ever vigilant to protect our way of life. Sustained economic and social development is best secured in a stable and peaceful environment. Our nation therefore requires efficient and effective security arrangements.

My Government, committed to an effective Defence Force will -

- Improve the career prospects, the training opportunities, and the counselling and welfare services available to all BDF ranks and increase the staff complement, capability and resources of the Force to enable it to better deliver its missions;
- Enhance the Force's capacity for gathering intelligence and security information and improve the tactical capacity of the special forces;

- Maintain the Coast Guard as an integral component of the BDF, dedicated among other things to the enforcement of the law and regulations pertaining to fisheries, territorial waters and the economic zone, drug interdiction, safety at sea, quarantine and prevention of breaches of revenue and customs legislation;
- Enhance capacity through the phased replacement of aging equipment; and through the provision of additional electronic communications and equipment;
- Strengthen capacity in the areas of construction and maintenance of facilities, equipment and vehicles;
- Strengthen its sports department for the delivery of its National Sports Development Programme.

The Royal Barbados Police Force is the main civil authority responsible for the maintenance of law and order in Barbados during normalcy. A well trained, professional police establishment is essential to the creation of an environment that is conducive to the attraction of new investments from local and foreign sources, and sustained improvement in the quality of life of our people.

My Government will -

- Continue to upgrade the technical capacity of the Force through training;
- Upgrade and expand the range of management training;
- Replace outdated equipment;
- Continue the refurbishment of police stations;
- Refurbish the Central Police headquarters building;
- Expand the range of community policing;
- Upgrade the status of the Regional Police Training Centre to a College with consequential upgrading of curricula.

At the regional level, Barbados will continue to work with our neighbours to strengthen cooperation in security through the Regional Security System.

FOREIGN POLICY

Barbados has had a proud and distinguished record in the conduct of its international relations and will seek to strengthen its relations with like-minded states.

My Government will undertake a comprehensive review of Barbados' foreign policy including the location of our diplomatic missions and honorary consulates and lead a parliamentary debate on that policy.

It will continue its leadership role in CARICOM, particularly in the area of regional integration, and explore possibilities for participation in Caribbean enterprises. It will also strengthen its relationship with Latin America and in particular, build on the fraternal links between Barbados and Panama.

My Government will also -

- Capitalise on our successful completion of the delimitation of Barbados' Extended Continental Shelf, and commence negotiations with our neighbours to delimit our maritime boundaries.
- Promote the concept of the Blue Economy within CARICOM by advancing the cause of the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism.
- Complete arrangements with the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in bilateral arrangements relative to Fishing, access to natural gas and a ferry transport service.
- Continue the deepening of relations with the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS).
- Work to create the concept of the CARIBBEAN as a Single Space for visitors and the concept of the CARIBBEAN Civilisation as a unique heritage destination and experience for Caribbean people and others.

LAW REFORM

The fundamental principle upon which a successful, modern justice system as a vehicle for creating and maintaining a just society rests is that laws are made for man; man was never made for the laws. The process of law making must be evolutionary. A satisfactory legal system must be set in a dynamic context and it must adjust to the changing mores and aspirations of the society.

Law making must therefore take into account the religious, educational, cultural, economic, social and political needs of the society, while adhering to the strict observance of the protection of rights. High priority must be given to those third-generation rights, which now form the basis for discussion on man's right to demand that the state provide him with the requisite legal protection, to enable him to freely choose all those things which he himself feels are necessary to satisfy his right to self-determination.

In the context of the foregoing, my Government will establish a Law Reform Commission empowered to consider, on its own initiative or at the invitation of the Attorney-General, areas of Law that appear to be in need of reform.

GOOD, HONEST GOVERNANCE

My Government, cognisant of the duty to provide good and honest governance to our nation will –

- Establish an Integrity Commission to facilitate the implementation of the Prevention of Corruption Act;
- Pass a Freedom of Information Act;
- Reform the Management of Public Expenditure.

Our proud nation has successfully weathered the greatest economic turbulence since Independence. The resourcefulness and common sense of our people have been central to this success. In all this we were able to count on the support of all Barbadians – those at home and those abroad. This nation will chart its course towards its fiftieth anniversary of independence in the most challenging of global environments. By God's

help and grace we will successfully reach this milestone striving always to open the pathways to continuing progress.

Madam President and Members of the Senate:

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

I have outlined to you my Government's programme for this new session of Parliament. I extend to you my best wishes in your new parliamentary session and pray that the blessings of Almighty God may guide your deliberations.

GOVERNOR-GENERAL

Government House
BARBADOS
March 6, 2013