



THRONE SPEECH

to be

DELIVERED BY

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at the

STATE OPENING OF PARLIAMENT

on

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SENATE CHAMBERS

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE
BY HER EXCELLENCY THE HON. SANDRA MASON GCMG, DA, QC

Mr President and Members of the Senate;

Mr Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly;

Specially invited guests, ladies and gentlemen

The Representatives of the House of Assembly have been elected and the selection of the Members of the Senate is complete. You have met and chosen your respective Presiding Officers. Parliament is now constituted and the First Session of the Honourable the Parliament 2018-2023 can begin.

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

At sunrise on May 25th, the people of Barbados welcomed a new day and a new government with renewed optimism and hope. It is in these historic chambers of the third oldest parliament of the Commonwealth that the men and women elected must join with those nominated, to transform that hope into reality and a bright future for a country and a people, bruised but not broken - a people, who now stand ready to join hands and work at Building the Best Barbados Together.

Our National Circumstances

My Government commences its historic mandate at a time of unprecedented economic and social uncertainty for Barbados and its people.

Our citizens are acutely aware of the enormous challenges that our country faces, which have become a part of their lived reality: a stagnant economy that has suffered multiple downgrades by international ratings agencies and is strangled by excessive taxation; unsustainably high levels of debt; inadequate foreign reserves to safeguard the value of the Barbados dollar; neglected infrastructure resulting in sick building syndrome and decaying sewerage, water, sanitation, road and transport systems.

These challenges have been exacerbated by other factors. There has been an escalating cost of living which makes it difficult for far too many of our citizens to have an acceptable quality of life. High levels of crime and gun violence result in fear and social malaise. We have seen a loss

of opportunity for our young people in an environment where fees must now be paid for tertiary education. And finally there has been no economic empowerment of our people. Together, these factors have had a debilitating and crippling impact on our society, economy, natural and built environments and have reversed our country's once clear and upward development trajectory.

My Government has identified urgent national challenges as Mission Critical issues on which it must and will take immediate action to confront and resolve. This will be implemented over six months. Our agenda will focus on addressing all Mission Critical issues. Clear timelines will be set for deciding on and applying solutions. Dedicated Mission Critical Teams, comprising public servants and highly experienced professionals, recognised nationally, regionally and, in some instances, internationally, will be established and tasked to ensure delivery. More important, proper management structures will be put in place to prevent these issues from reaching crisis proportions again.

In parallel, my Government will begin the implementation of its Five-year Agenda for National Transformation.

Most Governments come to office with one or two pressing issues requiring their immediate attention. For my Government, however, some 20 Mission Critical issues have been identified. In every instance, there will be severe consequences if these matters continue to be ignored or are not remedied.

Priority Action - The Mission Critical Agenda

The Economy

Immediately on taking office, my Government began to tackle the most pressing issue before it, namely the unacceptably high national debt and the falling level of foreign reserves which negatively impact Barbados' macro-economic position.

After extensive consultation over the last week with the Social Partners my Government has started the process of restructuring Barbados' public debt and renegotiating existing obligations. In so doing, it will seek the cooperation of its domestic and external creditors and the balance of payments support of the International Monetary Fund. It will continue to consult extensively with the Social Partners in the development of our own comprehensive Barbados Economic Recovery and Transformation Plan. This will ensure that the burden of economic adjustment is shared fairly and does not fall disproportionately onto workers.

My Government's macro-economic framework is to present a balanced budget by 2019 with no new financing requirements. At all relevant stages of the process, it will act with transparency and will keep the Parliament and the citizens of Barbados fully informed.

My Government wishes to assure the public that our core values, intention and approach remain as articulated throughout the recent General Elections. First and foremost, my Government remains committed to a fixed exchange rate and to preserving the value of the Barbados dollar. It will pursue policies to restore our Foreign Reserves cover to at least 15 weeks. We will do this through a variety of measures, including through the stimulation of investor confidence and by allowing Barbadians to retain foreign exchange they have earned, in foreign currency accounts in Barbados. Barbadian residents will be eligible for a foreign currency tax credit on all foreign exchange earned.

My Government fully understands that a stable society that offers opportunity for all is created and sustained only when a country gets its economic fundamentals right. Over-taxation cannot lead to economic recovery or a return to growth, nor does it lead individual citizens to prosperity.

Accordingly it will abolish the National Social Responsibility Levy (NSRL), which will lower the cost of living and stimulate consumer spending; abolish the Road Tax and replace it with a more equitable but bearable tax on petroleum products; repeal the requirement for tax clearance certificates; repeal the Municipal Solid Waste Tax and give a tax credit over a period of time to those who paid, and return the Value Added Tax (VAT) to a rate of 15% within 18 months. My Government knows the people of Barbados have high expectations of us. Even as we propose to enter into a programme with the IMF, we will keep faith with our citizens and we ask them to keep faith with us. The task ahead is not for the 30 elected or the 21 appointed, but for the 300,000 who live in Barbados and those of our citizens living in the Diaspora.

Working with a specialized Mission Critical Team, my Government will take immediate action to safeguard Barbados' financial services sector, which has hitherto been a major contributor to our economy. The Team's focus will be to settle the policy framework on international business by the internationally required deadline of December 2018, to ensure that Barbados is not once more unfairly blacklisted as an uncooperative jurisdiction by the OECD and the EU. Thereafter, the team will assist the Government in its efforts to redefine Barbados globally as a centre of excellence for certain niche sectors in international business and for potential new strategic growth areas where Barbados can develop a comparative advantage, especially as it relates to our quality of life and stability as a nation.

Addressing Government's Arrears

Arrears to citizens, corporations and institutions are extraordinarily high. They have caused severe cash flow problems, jeopardised the viability of businesses and institutions and created hardship for individuals. My Government has been briefed on the alarming level of accumulated arrears it has inherited which total at least 1.7 billion dollars as of September 30th, 2017. This includes refunds of income tax, VAT and NIS, as well as sums outstanding to UCAL, the UWI, the sugar industry and other suppliers of goods and services. This is unacceptable to my Government.

While there can be no overnight solution given the magnitude of the problem, my Government commits to assigning a dedicated team to work with affected individuals and companies on a feasible plan for settling Government's current indebtedness. We will thereafter work to establish a structure for regular on-time payment of money owed by Government to citizens and corporations. When the system is established and functioning well, Government will be required to pay interest or penalties for late payments.

Improving Infrastructure

The catastrophic failure of the South Coast Sewerage Plant poses a significant threat to the health of Barbadians and visitors, to the environment and near shore ecosystems, and to the economy as a whole.

My Government has declared the matter a National Emergency. My Government is taking urgent action to alleviate the problem while developing a plan for its definitive long-term resolution. We will utilize the best local and international expertise we can access. A dedicated team is already at work and has started to present its advice and recommendations to the Cabinet. Discussions are also underway to source funding and technical support for this emergency project.

Attention is also being turned to the ageing Bridgetown plant. Diversion of waste from the South Coast has placed additional pressure on this plant. Urgent pre-emptive and longer-term action is now needed to avert a similar occurrence in our capital city.

Barbados' debt to international creditors is extraordinarily high and unsustainable. It has brought our economy close to collapse.

My Government will re-profile our national debt and along with other sources of funding and savings, my Government will use the fiscal space achieved through debt re-profiling to finance other Mission Critical areas. These include providing an adequate number of buses to meet the transportation needs of the Barbadian public and an adequate fleet of trucks to ensure a regular and efficient garbage collection service; expanding the Accident and Emergency Department at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital; extending the opening hours at two polyclinics.

My Government will eliminate the Tipping Fee for solid waste disposal, which has contributed to a significant rise in illegal dumping, and will promote National Clean-Up and Beautification Programmes to return order and cleanliness once again to the Barbadian landscape.

Additionally, my Government will immediately utilise existing and procure additional funding and equipment to carry out a costed road repair and rebuilding programme. We will start with Barbados' most heavily trafficked roads. And it will comprehensively tackle the persistent problem of access to and availability of running water, particularly in communities in the northern and eastern parishes of Barbados. We will ensure that the Barbados Water Authority assists householders in the purchase and installation of water tanks, to allow for greater resilience at the household level. My Government will transition to renewable energy and back-up power at all pumping stations and reservoirs to provide continued service during natural disasters and other emergencies.

Helping People to Live

The harsh economic times which Barbadians have endured have severely impacted every household in Barbados. In the strong conviction that all Barbadians must be able to support their families and live with dignity, my Government will during this Term:-

- provide a Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) to Civil Servants if negotiations on salaries and benefits are not concluded with the Trades Unions within the next 3 months;
- raise the non-contributory pension from \$155 to \$225 per week, payable every fortnight, while maintaining the relativity between contributory and non-contributory pensions;
- raise the minimum wage from \$6.25 per hour to \$8.00 and extend it to all categories of workers across the economy;
- reduce the number of homes being foreclosed on by working with the banks to establish a Troubled Mortgage Relief Programme;
- pay the reverse tax credit of \$1,300 for those earning less than \$18,000;

- eliminate the 5,000 pit toilets still remaining across Barbados through a programme of works carried out via contracts to small contractors and community-based businesses;
- increase funeral grants by \$500; give priority in the Government's budget to the purchase of goods and services from small businesses, those run by economically disadvantaged or community-owned groups and young people; and
- establish a social safety net for families by ensuring a minimum household income below which no Barbadian family should fall. This will be accomplished by co-ordinating payments of the minimum wage, reverse tax credit, and welfare benefits, as well as by the use of other policies and instruments.

Empowering our Youth

My Government is committed to safeguarding our future generations and empowering them to have the best quality of life our country can give them. From the next semester in 2018, therefore, it will pay the tuition fees for Barbadians to attend The University of the West Indies.

In addition, it will create a National "First Job" Programme for youth between the ages of 16 and 25 to gain a Government-subsidised placement at a business in their field of interest; develop a National Apprenticeship Programme in which training of young people can be accelerated and supported and introduce a National Mentorship Programme through which adults and professionals will be invited to help to guide young people; convene an emergency session of professionals dealing with the welfare of children to agree on an immediate plan of action to end the current epidemic of violence and bullying in schools, including through increasing the number of Guidance Counsellors and Social Workers, introducing anger management and conflict resolution classes in schools by September 2018 and engaging Civil Society and faith-based organizations in support of these school programmes. The Government will also ensure a reliable and timely school bus service and, from September 2018, it will deploy Safety Officers, where necessary, on buses and at places where students and young people congregate in large numbers.

Keeping Barbadians Safe

My Government shares the concern of its citizens at the increased levels of crime and insecurity in Barbados, but is confident that with pro-active policing and targeted community outreach policies, the trend can be effectively reversed.

Once the Supreme Court Building is returned to full operation my Government will prioritise the appointment of three additional High Court Judges to address the backlog of serious criminal cases and to provide a framework for the prompt delivery of justice.

My Government will work to boost the morale of the Royal Barbados Police Force by ensuring that the matter of appointments and promotions is managed with transparency, fairness and expedition. We will also free police officers from carrying out non-law enforcement and administrative duties to enable them to better focus on policing, and will encourage greater emphasis on community-based policing.

Steps will be taken to make communities safer through debushing and the enhanced provision of street lighting. In addition, my Government will encourage a close partnership among the Church, community groups and Government agencies responsible for social services to reduce gun violence and support safe communities. It will offer a six-month gun amnesty and buy-back programme for legal and illegal firearms to reduce their numbers in the hands of civilians and in communities.

After a period of public education, debate and consultation my Government will hold a Referendum on the decriminalisation of recreational marijuana; in the interim however, we follow the science accept the benefits of medical marijuana in treating a multiplicity of complaints. We will regulate to facilitate its availability to those in need.

Stamping Out Corruption

Corruption is a stain on any society, and a significant drain on government revenues and the economy as a whole.

My Government is determined that it will not allow corruption to become endemic in Barbados. As part of its zero tolerance policy, it will move swiftly to fight and punish corruption in whatever quarter it has manifested itself or continues to do so. In furtherance of that objective, my Government will immediately introduce into this Parliament comprehensive Integrity Legislation which will hold Ministers and Board Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons accountable for their actions; require politicians and key public officials to disclose their assets and liabilities, and provide stiff penalties for those who attempt to bribe politicians and public officials.

The Sugar Industry and its Workers

Even though sugar is no longer Barbados' main source of foreign exchange my Government recognizes the important role it continues to play in the maintenance of our rural communities, our environment and our economy.

It therefore commits to resolving the outstanding matter of the monies owing to sugar farmers. It also commits to meeting urgently with all relevant stakeholders to agree on a plan for revitalizing the sugar cane industry and increasing the value-added from products such as specialty sugars and molasses.

Preparing for Natural Disasters

Recent extreme weather events in the Caribbean require of my Government serious, strategic and pre-emptive action.

Accordingly, my Government will ensure that it works to place the Department of Emergency Management in an appropriately equipped building capable of withstanding a hurricane of Category 5 strength.

My Government will also work with the insurance industry to develop a publicly supported catastrophe and risk insurance product for chattel houses valued \$125,000 and under; institute a 2018 Rapid Roof Replacement Programme to support homeowners replacing non-hurricane resistant roofs and carrying out other hurricane-proofing of their homes. Policy and preparation for the upcoming hurricane season will go beyond supporting the efforts of our citizens. My Government will develop a national storage capacity of generators, water, food and medicine to last 7 days; upgrade hurricane shelters so they can resist a Category 5 hurricane, and require and facilitate farmers and owners of large parcels of land to clean up their lands and clear drains and wells to allow freer water run-off during and after heavy rains.

Our Regional Commitments

My Government continues to believe that Barbados has a unique role to play in the revitalization of the regional integration movement, particularly through its lead responsibility for the Caricom Single Market and Economy (CSME).

Accordingly it will, as an early priority, reassert its assigned leadership role and work with member-states to complete the built-in agenda of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, so as to enable Barbadians to fully benefit from the opportunities to move themselves and their capital within the region. We will also work with other Member States to rapidly advance the Built In Agenda, especially to provide certainty as to the scope of rights to be enjoyed by persons moving within the region.

My Government recognises the daily movement with our brothers and sisters in the Eastern Caribbean continues to increase. We have similar challenges. Equally, my Government

recognises that the only region in the world with whom Barbados has a trade surplus is the region of the Eastern Caribbean. Given these realities, we will also seek to strengthen collaborative relations with the countries of the OECS.

As the major shareholder in LIAT, my Government will continue to work with the other shareholding countries in our ongoing efforts to confront the challenges faced by LIAT and to enhance LIAT's operations and profitability so as to maintain reliable and affordable movement within our region for our people.

Strategic Action - the 5 Year Transformational Agenda

My Government accepts that it must attend as first priority to those Mission Critical issues I have just outlined.

However, it considers it equally essential that it begins simultaneously to design and execute the kind of transformational policies in those new and dynamic areas which can create the platform for sustained economic growth into the future and lasting prosperity for our citizens.

My Government has determined that the tax and spend tools of the past 52 years can no longer deliver for a modern Barbados.

In this 5-year term, it will therefore begin the process of deconstructing what Government does and reconstructing it to better fit the country's needs and today's technologies. Other tools, including legislation, regulation, facilitation, investment and empowerment will be brought to the fore as my Government works to reclaim Barbados' economic independence.

My Government will confront unemployment and underemployment and build a more prosperous society characterised by high skills and entrepreneurship, in which all of our people are given the tools to build wealth, well-being and security.

Existing sectors will be modernised and new economic sectors created. Our growth must be led by our people and our concept of who constitutes the Private sector must change - from vendors to public owned enterprises.

In this regard my Government has set out several new avenues for every Barbadian to build and share capital so as to maximise income earning potential, stimulate economic activity, and increase the penetration of the Barbados Brand into the Caribbean and global markets.

We are committed to not just a graduate in every household but an Entrepreneur In Every Home.

To reach this goal we will pursue a number of policies. These include:

- Trust Loans - My Government will take a chance on ordinary Barbadians, especially those left behind by the policies of traditional financial institutions, by providing \$10 million per year for each of the next 5 years to seed a Trust Loans Fund to give to small businesses or business owners security-free loans of up to \$5,000 each. When this loan sum is paid in full and the borrower has built a good credit profile, the business/owner will become entitled to a loan of up to \$10,000.
- The Prime Minister's Innovation Award will be given quarterly. The prizes will be worth \$250,000 each and are intended to spark new ideas, innovations and new business. These prizes will allow Barbadian innovators, particularly those without access to funding, to generate new wealth, jobs and bring foreign exchange into the economy.
- The Youth Innovation Award worth \$150,000 of prize money will be open to all youth. When won by school students the prize will be allocated between the winning school, teacher and students.
- Making all Barbadians Investment Promoters - My Government will encourage all Barbadians to promote new investments in Barbados, and to qualify for a pre-set introduction and success fee if the investment takes off. For this purpose and in the interest of transparency and anti-corruption, a register of promotions and promoters will be established. The Government's aim is to widen the scope for all Barbadians and to act against corrupt practices in the promotion of investments by people who may have special access to Government Ministers, Board Chairmen and senior public servants.

The Barbados Sovereign Wealth Fund

My Government will create a Barbados Sovereign Wealth Fund (BSWF) to ensure national wealth is available for present and future generations of Barbadians. The Fund will hold Government assets, including real property (on and offshore) and non-tangible assets such as trademarks, patents and intellectual property. The Fund will ensure appropriate, professional,

long-term management, development and returns from these assets. A percentage of the revenues of petroleum products will flow to the Fund, to ensure oil and gas earnings are not squandered, but become a source of funding for Barbados' long-term development.

After its establishment, every Barbadian, upon turning 18, will become entitled to a stake in the Fund. Over time, this stake will produce an income or could be used as collateral for loans for housing, education and other specified purposes.

ACCESS TO CAPITAL

My Government will introduce a range of new instruments to ensure Barbadians have access to money. Crowd funding and the strengthening of the Junior Capital Markets are but two examples.

Through these and several other initiatives, including the strategic use of procurement policy to create wealth for young people, small businesses and disadvantaged groups, giving new impetus to the creative economy with a 52-week Calendar of Festivals and the acquiring of geographic markers for Barbadian rum, Black Belly Sheep and cotton, my Government will place capital in the hands of Barbadians.

It will therefore ensure that Barbadians are equipped to manage capital and savings. It will amend the school curriculum to teach every Barbadian young person about money management and investing, in order to encourage a more financially independent Barbadian. It will also establish Regional Advisory Bureaus to assist Barbadians in their financial literacy and commercial decision-making. This will strengthen small businesses by teaching them how to source, compete for and successfully negotiate government contracts under new Procurement Legislation that will recognise the need for affirmative action.

Creating New Frontiers of Economic Development

My Government has identified the Green and Blue Economies as areas in which new policy directions can redound to the benefit of Barbados' long term economic, social and environmental development. In 2007, it was a Barbados Labour Party Government that rolled out the first National Green Economy Policy in the Americas and one of the first in the world. My Government remains committed to a Green Economy as part of Barbados' wider approach to reducing our carbon footprint and our mitigation and adaptation strategies to the threat that climate change poses to our sustainable development.

Accordingly the Government will put policies in place to help Barbados transition, by 2030, to the first 100% green and carbon neutral island-state in the world. These policies will include: requiring all Government vehicles and street lighting to run on clean energy by 2025; granting duty-free concessions to PSV operators to import vehicles powered by alternative energy sources; incentivising the use of green energy by commercial properties within the time frame to meet national deadlines; incentivising the use of clean energy vehicles by businesses and individuals; introducing grid-tied and/or off-grid/standalone renewable energy systems at public schools and shelters to mitigate the effects of disasters due to climate change; and utilising a research and development framework that allows for domestic innovation of renewable technologies.

My Government's policy to power Barbados from renewable sources will not only create new, highly paid jobs and decent work, but will have the added benefit of reducing foreign exchange spending on fossil fuels.

The maritime space over which Barbados now has jurisdiction is four hundred times greater than that of our land space.

There are exciting untapped possibilities for the sustainable exploitation of our marine environment. For this reason my Government has established a new Ministry of Maritime Affairs and the Blue Economy. The Ministry will be charged with responsibility for preserving Barbados' coastlines, our marine environment, the health of our reefs and the habitats of our marine plants and animals. It will ensure sustainable use and development of our fisheries, our marine assets, resources, minerals and species for sustainable recreation and decent livelihoods for those who make a living from the sea.

My Government recognises its responsibility to Barbadians yet unborn. As its pay forward project, my Government will extensively restore our coral reefs and build new ones to increase the habitats of marine species, protect our coastlines and provide for increased and improved snorkelling, dive sites and fishing. It will create new marine conservation areas to the west and north of the island, declare Carlisle Bay a Marine Protected Area and rationalise the legislation governing marine protected areas.

My Government will capitalise on our large coastline and our geographical location by training nationals in a range of maritime, technical and specialist skills in seafaring, yachting, boating, fishing, sail making, navigating, and the full suite of nautical and marine services. It will transform Barbados' Ships' Registry to provide a greater contribution to our international business sector.

It will take the fishing industry to the next level of development by establishing more berths for fishing vessels at the Bridgetown Fisheries Complex, broadening the ownership of fishing vessels through rent to own mechanisms, and upgrading our fish markets to world-class facilities that meet international phytosanitary standards.

My Government will also provide the necessary regulatory and fiscal environment to promote the creation of a small number of new islands and peninsulas off the west and south coasts of Barbados, through the reclamation of land over the next decade. This will result in new tourism, economic, and cultural hubs and hundreds of jobs. An Environmental Scoping Study will first be done to determine its feasibility. An appropriate Social Impact Study will also be required. Policy and legislation will be put in place to ensure that Barbadians maintain the freehold of this new land space while providing 99 year commercial leases to those investing.

My Government will create new high-quality jobs and encourage new activity and investment by establishing six Special Economic Zones. It will move immediately to make Heritage Bridgetown a Smart and Creative City and put in place all that is required to facilitate its conversion. This will be a precursor to Barbados becoming a "Smart Country." It will also designate and promote Speightstown as a Heritage, Artistic and Culinary Centre, Holetown as a Tourism and Entertainment Centre, St Lawrence Gap as an Entertainment District, Oistins as the epicentre of Barbados' fishing industry and Six Roads as the premier Industrial Corridor. It will pursue wider tourism activities in education, health and sports tourism that can be developed in the centre and east of the island from St. Lucy to St. Philip.

Harnessing Technology for Economic Development

An essential component of our future economy will be Barbadians exporting professional services to the world down a high speed internet connection. My Government will embrace the digital economy and lead the transformation by providing all Barbadians with a digital ID; facilitating the creation of free, basic Wi-Fi, across the island as a means of powering the new national digital economy, Smart Cities and a Smart Barbados. This will be an enabler for growth, connectivity, innovation and fully integrated platforms for social and economic activity. It will also digitise the Barbados dollar in order to allow Barbadians to conduct their business using existing or digital methods, making payments quicker and cheaper.

My Government will work with the private sector to create an Innovation Hub around the Cave Hill Campus of the UWI, housing global research and technology companies. It will follow the examples of best practice, such as Scotland's CivTech Programme.

It will prioritise the effective use of technology within the public service to increase accountability, and eliminate unnecessary duplication, bureaucracy, wastage and corruption. It

will create a centralised Digital Services Committee to play the lead role in delivering people-centric public services and to co-ordinate and rationalise several existing units such as the Data Processing Department, e-Government Unit, e-Commerce Unit, Telecommunications Unit, and the many ICT units of individual Ministries, Departments and Agencies.

My Government will use technology to improve the quality and speed of the delivery of a wide range of high-demand Government services and to facilitate online payments for their provision. It will support and leverage new technologies, such as Blockchain, wherever such technologies have the proven ability to boost foreign reserves, democratise the economy, create economic empowerment for Barbadians and build wealth. It will also consider the capacity of this and other nascent technologies to mitigate the impact on economic activity of the termination of correspondent banking relationships between international banks and indigenous Caribbean banks. My Government will also develop a Sandbox Regime for regulation. This will facilitate FinTech start-ups and other innovators while not exposing our mainstream Financial sector.

Realising the Potential of the Creative Economy

My Government will create a new model for culture and the creative industries in Barbados, commencing with a transformation of the National Cultural Foundation, the Crop Over Festival and NIFCA. It will evolve the Barbados Cultural Industries Development Authority to become one that nurtures, showcases, markets and exports the products of Barbadian creative professionals to the world. It will facilitate the production and promotion of a 52 week calendar for the arts, entertainment and sports including at least, one world-class festival, every two months.

My Government will re-establish a National School for Dance, with an adjunct National Dance Company, as well as a National School for the Performing Arts, similarly with a National Performing Arts Company. It will resource the National Film Commission to play a lead role in repositioning Barbados as a welcoming jurisdiction for film and video productions and strategic co-productions, as well as supporting the further development of an indigenous film industry. And it will bring true life to a National Art Gallery that acquires, houses, protects and displays important works by Barbadians and provides workspace for collaborative activities.

Prioritising Wellness

Non-Communicable Diseases are the major cause of death and disability in Barbados and consume approximately 70% of the budgets of the QEH and the Barbados Drug Service. My Government will shift the emphasis of our health care system to prevention and the promotion of wellness. It will target chronic non-communicable diseases by encouraging and incentivising Barbadians to take greater responsibility for their own health. This will be accomplished through the provision of Health Is Wealth Grants to those who change their lifestyle and, through exercise and improved diets, reduce the severity of their chronic disease and reduce their need for expensive drug therapies and surgery. The Government will work with doctors, dietitians

and other health care professionals to establish appropriate objective criteria for qualification for the grant.

In addition my Government will work to make healthy foods and essential items more affordable for Barbadians by exempting a basket of goods, food, and medication from VAT. It will embed healthy lifestyles in schools, communities and the education system by fusing the production of fruit, vegetables and healthy produce with some aspects of the school meals programme.

Education for Development

At the core of Government's development model is its commitment to and its reform of Barbados' system of education and training. That system has focussed heavily on academic-based learning that does not adequately take into account the multiple ways or various stages at which children and young people learn and grow.

My Government will resume the diagnostic approach to allow it to effectively assess the learning capacity of each child, because each child matters. All children will be given the opportunity to excel at academics if that is their choice. For those who are not academically inclined, more flexible teaching and learning systems will be put in place.

Secondary schools will become centres of excellence for both traditional disciplines, including the arts and sciences, and technical and creative disciplines. This will give students genuine and beneficial choices and wider career options and remove any sense of failure attached to pursuing a non-academic path. In addition my Government will develop a secondary school as a specialist sports centre with strong emphasis on training a cadre of world-class coaches, athletes and sports professionals.

My Government will ensure that over the next decade all Barbadian youth will become multi-skilled and excel at home and abroad. It will provide every young person the opportunity to speak a second language, learn to swim, learn basic first aid, take part in a sport at a competitive level, engage in art, music and other creative disciplines, travel to a foreign country and be exposed to entrepreneurial training, including financial literacy.

Opportunities for Technical Specialisation

My Government will create a number of posts classified as Master Teacher and Senior Specialist Nurse, as a reward for the attainment of excellence in these professions. Good teachers and

nurses will no longer have to be promoted into administration and out of teaching and nursing in order to receive a better salary.

Nurses and teachers are only two of the categories of Civil Servants affected by the absence of technical promotion streams in their field. My Government will review all affected areas in an attempt to keep our other technocrats in their fields of specialisation and strengthen delivery in the Civil Service.

Bringing Governance into the 21st Century

My Government will pursue a shift from a legal and justice system built on the colonial approach of punishment and incarceration, to more modern thinking and approaches, with a focus on rehabilitation and restoration for minor and victimless offences. It will undertake a comprehensive reform of our criminal justice system.

My Government will create a decentralised, multi-jurisdictional, specialist Family Court under the Family Law Act that will hear all Family Law matters now being managed in both the Magistrates and High Court. It will be fully serviced by all of the relevant Government and NGO social services with the welfare of the children and the family as its primary concern.

My Government will also introduce a Commercial Court, funded by its users, to facilitate the speedy, efficient, and transparent resolution of commercial disputes. It will work with all established international centres of arbitration and promote Barbados as a Centre for International Arbitration and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).

Giving Barbadians a Greater Say In National Affairs

The empowerment of people is central to the mission of my Government which believes that greater responsibility must be entrusted to our citizens and communities in ways that foster fairness and deepen democracy. Its vision for Barbados includes Barbadians who are confident and knowledgeable enough about matters of state to make contributions to civic affairs, community development and national governance.

My Government will empower Barbadians by establishing new governance structures and expanding existing ones. This will increase opportunities for inclusive dialogue and transparency and for nationals to speak directly to their political representatives. Barbadians will have a greater say in national affairs through the establishment of People's Assemblies. These will be elected and will be directly engaged in activities to strengthen and protect our communities, thus helping to increase the participation of our citizens in civic affairs and assist in the role of

oversight of key statutory entities. They will enhance communication between communities, Members of Parliament and Government and also act as effective enablers for resource mobilisation on behalf of communities and citizens who are in genuine need.

My Government will continue to engage directly with the Barbadian public through initiatives such as Rubbing Shoulders. It will introduce National Dialogues, National Referenda and a framework for People's Initiatives. My Government will consult with Barbadians on major national issues, such as the decriminalisation of recreational marijuana and the question of Parliamentary Reform, including fixed dates for elections and term limits for Prime Ministers.

In summary my Government will pursue every avenue to ensure that all Barbadians and residents are informed and active partners in the process of transformational nation building.

The Legislative Agenda

My Government's comprehensive programme for this Parliamentary term will require the enactment of legislation in several areas. Priorities will include Integrity and Freedom of Information Bills; legislation to prevent the indiscriminate printing of money by the Central Bank; the enactment, by December 2018, of a legislative framework that will remove Barbados from the list of uncooperative jurisdictions and from the threat of sanctions by the OECD and the EU; an updated Procurement Act; the establishment of Special Economic Zones; a Clean Air Act; Equal Pay; Paternity Leave; Reverse Mortgages for Senior Citizens; the Retirement Age; the legislation to govern the establishment and functioning of People's Assemblies; legalisation to govern Referenda and People's Initiatives; a legislative framework to create certainty regarding the rights and benefits of returning nationals. In addition my Government has committed to the review of the recent amendments at the end of the last Parliament to the Police Act, the Road Traffic Act and the Agricultural Products and Livestock Act.

Mr President and Members of the Senate; Mr Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly. I have outlined my Government's programme for this new session.

My Government is determined to move Barbados and Barbadians from the precipice of peril to a new prosperity. Barbados needs the joint effort of a committed government, its institutions and all of its citizens. We look forward to working in partnership with Barbadians at home and abroad, in Building The Best Barbados; a country symbolised by excellence, a respected, world-class country in which our economy is strong, sustainable and resilient, our society is just, stable, cohesive and vibrant, where our built environment is properly maintained and our natural environment is preserved and protected; a Barbados in which Barbadians are safe, kind, confident, innovative, productive, optimistic and happy.

The task of moving our beloved country from stagnation to transformation is not beyond us as a people. We must embrace our responsibility to our country and to each other, to

strengthening our society, to building a resilient economy, to protecting our environment and renewing our infrastructure, to broadening our democracy by giving Barbadians more say, modernising our governance structures and systems, to redefining our engagement with a rapidly changing world and to crafting for ourselves a new national consciousness, one that will inspire and motivate us to give of our best, working tirelessly to achieve our dreams, for the sake of present and future generations.

Our forefathers had faith that the future of Barbados would be safe with us. Let us dream together, let us dare to surmount our challenges and let us with firm resolve, do the work necessary to secure social, economic and environmental sustainability for ourselves and for the future for generations yet unborn.

With new daring, firm determination, and decisive action, let us as a united people assert afresh and justify the confidence of our forefathers as captured in these words from our national anthem:

Upward and onward we shall go,
Inspired, exulting, free,
And greater will our nation grow
In strength and unity.”

I extend my best wishes to you for a productive session as you carry out your legislative responsibilities on behalf of the people of Barbados.

I pray, as always, that God shall guide your deliberations.