



INAUGURAL ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY

THE HON. GASTON BROWNE

PRIME MINISTER OF ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

AT THE

ANTIGUA RECREATION GROUNDS, ST. JOHN'S, ANTIGUA

WEDNESDAY, 18 JUNE 2014

“Fair Antigua and Barbuda, we thy sons and daughters stand. Strong and firm in peace or danger...to safeguard our native land; we commit ourselves to building a true nation, brave and free! Ever striving, ever seeking, dwell in love and unity”.

Fellow Antiguan and Barbudans, Colleague Prime Ministers, Fellow Members of the Cabinet of Ministers of Antigua and Barbuda, other parliamentarians, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, The Judiciary, Religious and other sectoral leaders, visiting and other specially invited Guests, Comrades of the Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party, supporters, well-wishers, friends all!! I speak to you today as your humble servant leader.

I am slotted on the program to deliver an “address”, but ‘thank you’, is really what I wish to say.

I cannot thank you enough for this opportunity to serve my beloved Antigua and Barbuda, at the highest level,...at this point in our developmental process.

With each passing day, as I discover the severity of our fiscal challenges, I am inspired to work doubly hard to justify the confidence you have reposed in us to nurture and lead this beautiful land of ours back to robust economic health and prosperity.

We have just emerged from a long and gruelling general election campaign in which we set as our overarching goal, the transformation of Antigua and Barbuda as the economic powerhouse of the Caribbean.

Some may describe that as a nice campaign slogan or catch phrase...Well, I am saying this evening, that general elections will not be called in Antigua for another five years....yet, I am once again restating my vision and my intention to transform Antigua and Barbuda into the economic powerhouse of the Caribbean. This is a goal that I believe is entirely attainable and it is one that I am hereby committing this newly installed government to achieve.

I know it is oftentimes said that politicians would do and say anything to get elected. Well, the final vote has been counted and the Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party has been elected to lead this country. Yet, notwithstanding that achievement, I am once again this evening recommitting

my party in government to the pursuit of every single undertaking made in our campaign manifesto, entitled “The People’s Rescue Plan”.

It was suggested, for example, that we were dangling a carrot before our Caribbean brothers and sisters, when we promised we would eliminate work permit fees for Caricom nationals.

Well, there is no need for any sort of dangling this evening. Nevertheless, I am announcing today, OECS Day, that effective Monday, 26th June, 2014, no work permit fees shall be collected from Caricom citizens who have been offered duly advertised and processed employment opportunities in Antigua and Barbuda!

All type of spinning was done in relation and retaliation to our proposal to ease the strain on persons whose light and water services had been disconnected as a result of lengthy, outstanding bills. That too was described as an election gimmick.

Well, once again, this evening, general elections are over. Nevertheless, I met two days ago with management of APUA and have put them on notice that I want newly installed Minister Robin Yearwood to sit with them first thing Monday morning and determine how this initiative can be fast track and implemented, effective July 1st, 2014.

I do not wish to hear how difficult it is and how much work would be involved....I want it implemented in the month of July! Period! Full stop!! Furthermore, I want an end to uncertainty over jobs at APUA. APUA can be a strong, vibrant, self-sustaining social and economic entity in Antigua and Barbuda. I am confident this establishment can be nursed back to economic health.

I want the workers at APUA to feel secure in their jobs, so they can give of their best, in the service of the people of this country. The water problems we have been having will be addressed as a matter of urgency. Indeed, based on my discussions with APUA and other very serious investors, I ask you this evening to give us 180 working days to solve water supply problems in this country. I shall meet with the Minister and his senior management early next week to discuss my vision for this very important social and economic entity.

I saw where it was said that a serious proposal that has the potential to create thousands of jobs for Antiguans and Barbudans, was lying inactive on a Prime Minister's desk for months. That will not happen under this Antigua Labour Party administration! If it can be done, it will be done! If it cannot fly, it will not be left to drift.

As a Government, we shall say to investors, local and foreign, 'tweet this proposal or no we are not interested'. But the Prime Minister's Office in Antigua and Barbuda shall no longer be a warehouse for storage of glossy proposals but shall be the engine for the transformation of our fair nation.

This Government was elected less than one week ago. A cornerstone of our general election campaign was the provision of affordable housing. Indeed, we promised 500 houses in 500 days. Those with little or no vision said it could not be done.

Well, I have already met with officials of Petro Caribe and the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela yesterday, and while I do not wish to steal the thunder of the new Minister of Housing and Lands, I want to say to small contractors in Antigua and Barbuda, to start dusting your tools. Start checking your rolodex for contact information for all those laid off workers. The 500 homes in 500 days initiative, that some said could not be done, shall commence 30 days from today!!

I make these announcements now, Ladies and Gentlemen, because there is no understandable rationale for their delay. Our country needs to move from neutral and into drive.

When we speak about transforming this country into the economic powerhouse of the Caribbean, we refer not only to bricks and buildings, but to expeditious decision making so that all may come on board in this vital mission for our people.

We shall create a climate in this country where government works, where things happen. I look forward very much to meeting with senior public officers across the service in the weeks ahead, with a view to understanding and addressing your concerns and also to sharing our vision and setting forth my expectations of each employee of the Government of Antigua and Barbuda.

I understand clearly that your energy is generated by the speed, vision and determination of the leader and the line Ministers.

Already, I see clearly where for many of my Ministers and I, tomorrow will be the start of some 12 and 15 hour work days.

We must change the culture of work in this country. We have all got to sign on to the vision of carrying Antigua and Barbuda forward. If any country in the Caribbean can, in short order, return to the point of punching beyond its weight class, it is Antigua and Barbuda.

God has Blessed us with many natural attributes. There is nothing so wrong with this country that a strong dose of hard work by all, combined with firm and visionary leadership, cannot cure.

I am therefore summoning this country to focused and productive work! I am appealing to the workers of this country to give your all. We need to accelerate the pace by which we do things and the rate at which we get things done in this beautiful country of ours.

The Cabinet of ministers as sworn in this evening, shall be at your service. I am serious about wanting to nurture a new culture in this country. We shall work in the service of the people. I do not want my ministers caught up in all the garb and other trappings of office. There is plenty to be done in this country and time is not on our side. We shall consult with stakeholders, we shall seek the wise counsel of experts in their respective fields...but, very importantly, we shall make timely decisions!

Tomorrow the Cabinet of Ministers shall hold its inaugural meeting and I have already identified several manifesto promises that can be acted upon and duly adopted at that first session. Again, the principle shall be one of not leaving to next week or next month, that which can be acted upon today.

We want you as Antiguan and Barbudans to believe in yourselves again. We are honoured this evening to have the presence of three Caribbean Prime Ministers in our midst. This is not by

chance. This is as a result of our sending clear and positive signals to our Caribbean neighbours of our wanting to reopen the doors of Antigua and Barbuda for cooperation and collaboration.

I shall be working with these three leaders in particular very closely. But, in general, it is my intention to return Antigua and Barbuda to its once pivotal place in the OECS, Caricom and wider hemispheric organizations and associations.

The late V. C Bird and our Comrade Lester Bryant Bird did a marvellous job in the last quarter of the 20th century to put Antigua and Barbuda in the vanguard of Caribbean economic and political integration.

I am a product of that transformation. I therefore carry in my heart a deeper commitment and passion to build on their legacy. I am deeply conscious as to how the work of my government can foster the love for country and create the opportunities for Antiguan and Barbudan children just as they did for me and my generation. That is our clear mission and I pledge to Antiguan and Barbudans that my Government will come to work every day to make this commitment their reality.

We want for Antiguan and Barbudans to be proud of their country. Our symbols must mean something. Our monuments must reflect that pride. This Antigua Recreation Ground, in the state in which we found it, spoke volumes to the level of deterioration and decay that had taken place in this country over the last decade. This event here this evening signals the start of the restoration campaign. We shall restore not only the ARG but the pride of our people in the ARG and similar landmarks around our country.

Yes, we have a nation to build and a people to mould. Yes, we seek to instil a new way of thinking. Yes, we want to transform the social and economic lives of our people. Yes, we want to build the infrastructure of this country. But, most importantly, we want to make Antiguan and Barbudans proud of Antigua and Barbuda again.

We want to send loud and positive messages to the region and the world that Antigua and Barbuda has been redeemed. That we are once again not only a force but the economic force in

the region. We are determined to transform this country of ours into the economic powerhouse of the Caribbean and that...Ladies and Gentlemen, is my pledge to you this evening.

Let us go forth from this place fortified in the knowledge that together we can, together we must and together we will rebuild Antigua and Barbuda.