



His Excellency

Dr. Rodney Williams

Governor-General of Antigua and Barbuda

Delivers the Speech from the Throne

“REBUILDING A BROKEN NATION”

August 15 2014
Parliament Building
St. John’s, Antigua and Barbuda

Madame President and Members of the Senate:

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

One hundred and eighty years ago, on August 1st 1834, the Antigua Free Press Newspaper carried an editorial in which it proclaimed to the majority population: *Today you are free. Free as any white man in the British Empire.*

While that picture of the freedom of our forebears was quite inflated, it is absolutely the case that one system of economic exploitation ended, and a new stage of colonialism took root, commencing in 1834. Nevertheless, what occurred exactly 180 years ago, on August 1st 1834, is still celebrated by the descendants of those men and women who set out to build a new Caribbean civilization.

We have been attempting to evolve an economic system that produces large quantities of wealth that is equitably distributed. Simultaneously, the English-speaking Caribbean countries have evolved a system of democracy that makes the rest of the world sit-up and take note.

On June 12 2014, a mere sixty-four days ago, one administration demitted office and the Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party (ABLP) assumed the reins of control of government. That smooth transfer of control from one administration to another is not deemed unusual. It had occurred at least four times before, beginning in 1971, and again in 1976, then in 1994, and for a fourth time in 2004. Yet, it was remarkable.

We are not only free; we are the intelligent masters of our own destiny, today.

Because of certain fiscal challenges that reverberated throughout the body politic, our newly-elected leaders are setting about to rebuild a broken nation; and, failure is not an option.

I wish to convey my personal best wishes to Prime Minister Gaston Browne, the leader of the Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party, for his successful leadership of the ABLP at the June 12 polls. I applaud the leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Baldwin Spencer, for his magnanimity on the morning of June 13 2014. I congratulate the Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission for its flawless conduct of the 2014 general elections.

The people of Antigua and Barbuda are the custodians of an advanced system of democracy, and we have much to celebrate, given the history of our inheritance dating back to 1834.

Madame President and Members of the Senate:

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

It behoves me to convey congratulations to the President of the Senate, Madame Alincia Williams-Grant, who is a vibrant young professional female. I also note that eight of the seventeen members of the Senate are women, establishing gender equality that before never existed in the Senate. I also note that two very young members of the Senate, at 23 years, make this Senate a very special place in the annals of Antigua and Barbuda's history. I convey my congratulations to every member of this historic Upper House that is gender-balanced.

Equally, I convey my congratulations to Sir Gerald Watt, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and to every Member of the Lower

House for their successful election. This team, it is evident, with a doubling of the female representation, is ready to rebuild.

Madame President and Members of the Senate:

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

Since assuming office, my new Government has discovered that many of the assertions which it made about the governance of Antigua and Barbuda, during the unusually lengthy campaign period, were accurate. In fact, several important assessments were understated.

My Government has discovered that many debts remained unpaid, past the due date, placing Antigua and Barbuda very close to the precipice. It is not my Government's intention to dampen the investment climate; however, it is remarkably the case that many very innovative steps have been taken to avoid the catastrophe that awaited my Government, after June 12 2014.

Let me assure Antigua and Barbuda's several creditors, large and small, domestic and foreign, that my Government intends to discharge its responsibilities. My Government will meet its debt obligations by growing this economy, while keeping expenditure within manageable limits.

It is my Government's objective to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) in significant amounts during the next 12 months, and for years to come. My Government's ultimate objective is to turn Antigua and Barbuda into an economic powerhouse in the Caribbean, not unlike tiny Singapore in Southeast Asia.

Evidence of my Government's intent took place on the afternoon of June 13 2014. Hours after the Prime Minister and the Attorney-General took the several oaths of office, my Government proceeded to enter into a ***Memorandum of Agreement*** with an investor group. The

Memorandum of Agreement spelled-out in broad yet specific ways how a two-billion dollar development plan will be implemented, at Guiana Island and its environs. News of the quick turnaround on the Agreement has spawned a burst of interest internationally that can only result in good for Antigua and Barbuda.

Yet, some did ask: What is the haste? The answer is to be found in the faces and in the expectations of many unemployed men and women, who require jobs and incomes immediately. The primary object of my Government, at this time, is to create jobs—an abundance of jobs—so that all able-bodied men and women who wish to earn an income may have employment choices in their selection.

My Government is certain that many more of those developments and Agreements are coming; they will provide abundant jobs and significant economic opportunities for all. These investments will enlarge the government's revenue base, spur economic growth, reduce borrowings and reduce unemployment significantly. The specific aim is to create full employment in Antigua and Barbuda.

If 1939 signaled a new period in the history of Antigua and Barbuda; and, if 1976 in retrospect also marked the start of another new period; then, my Government is certain that 2014 will also mark a fresh start to a new era in the economic and social life of the Antigua and Barbuda that we all love.

Madame President and Members of the Senate:

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

My Government has set forth its bold vision for the future through its ***"People's Rescue Plan...A Strategic Vision To Rebuild and Empower"***. Every action it has undertaken since taking control, on June 13 2014, is

in keeping with its varied and multi-sectoral vision expressed in the published plan.

It pleases me, therefore, to announce that a significant portion of the financing which is required to fund the start-up of the **500 homes in 500 days** initiative has been identified, and is now available. Some land has been identified in Villa and the Cooks Hill areas to commence the process.

However, it has come as a complete surprise to my Government to learn that hundreds of acres of Crown land, all across Antigua, initially transferred to CHAPA for sale and distribution to would-be homeowners, have been wrongfully pledged to a joint venture operation with a single, private homebuilder. In an attempt to ensure the equitable distribution of wealth, and justice for all, my Government will reverse that earlier decision.

My Government's plan is to ensure that multiple builders—as many as 50 contractors—may each get an opportunity to engage in constructing 10 homes each, over the next 17 months or in 500 days. Before October 31 2015, my Government expects that it will have constructed all 500 homes. Promise made; promise to be fulfilled.

Madame President and Members of the Senate:

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

My Government has also moved to have many current homeowners and tenants forgiven their outstanding utilities bill, owed to APUA up to December 31 2013. By providing a fresh start, APUA would have registered an increase in payments, as many ratepayers have come back on-line for 2014. Homeowners who were unable to meet both past and present obligations, simultaneously, will be reconnected to the grid and will pay only their current obligations going forward. No-

one else should die by asphyxiation or have their property destroyed by fire because they relied upon generators or candles to provide light at night. Promise made; promise fulfilled!

My Government has also encouraged those businesses that owed ABST or anyone owing property taxes, payable to the Inland Revenue Department, to pay-off their arrears in a single lump sum; in exchange for this one-time payment, all late charges and punitive fees, due and owing up until December 31 2013, are forgiven. My Government is providing a fresh start for those who take advantage of the offer. Promise made; promise being fulfilled.

While outstanding debts were being forgiven rate-payers and taxpayers, my Government has actively sought and is receiving offers of bilateral cooperation from the Governments of Brazil, Canada, China, Cuba, France, Japan, Mexico, the USA, Venezuela and others. Meetings with the President of China at the CELA-China Summit went very well, as did the bilateral meetings with the Presidents of Brazil and Venezuela; and the CARICOM-Japan summit with the Prime Minister of Japan went extremely well, my Government can report.

It had been claimed that our people could celebrate a new pride, internationally, following a change of administration a decade ago. My Government can present the evidence of successes in our relations with our regional and international partners, in two months of governance, demonstrating convincingly that the nation's new leadership has restored the pride lost.

Madame President and Members of the Senate:

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

Antigua and Barbuda will send delegations led by the Prime Minister to Beijing, China, next week; to the United Nations General Assembly next month; and to Mexico City in the month following. In Mexico, more than US\$40 million dollars in bilateral cooperation will flow. In China,

the mix of grants and loans exceeding US\$100 million dollars, to expand the port, for example, will be of great benefit to the Antigua and Barbuda people.

Summit meetings with the Presidents of Brazil and Chile, and with the President of Venezuela, have already taken place—two such meetings in their capitals. The benefits from these exchanges are beginning to flow, my Government can report. Venezuela will assist us in transforming the West Indies Oil Company, increasing significantly the bunkering capacity of the plant. During the Prime Minister's recent travel to Italy, oil and gas exploration will take place offshore, soon.

It is the intention of my Government to maximize every offer of bilateral cooperation; the offers represent significant sources of foreign capital, or a significant savings of government expenditure on development projects. Bilateral cooperation contributes significantly to economic growth and job creation.

My Government expresses its gratitude for the very useful assistance thus far provided by Brazil, Canada, Cuba, China, France, Mexico, the USA, Venezuela, the OAS, the United Nations and the Commonwealth of Nations, among others. My Government recognizes, however, that there are limitations to the amounts in bilateral and multilateral grants which can be harnessed. Sustainable growth comes primarily through the private sector, my Government believes.

Madame President and Members of the Senate:

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

My Government understands the importance of growing tourism. It is **the** engine of growth in the Antigua and Barbuda economy. This realization has therefore caused my Government to dispatch the Minister of Tourism to meet with the international air carriers and the

cruise-ship operators, with those who have responsibility for the new air terminal, now under construction, and with several prospective investors interested in building a new seaport.

Hundreds of millions of dollars are being invested by my Government in enlarging capacity, ensuring a more modern infrastructure, and improving the visitor experience. Several new hotels will be built, enlarging the number of available rooms and beds; and several existing properties will be refurbished and placed back into the stream of commerce. The Royal Antiguan will be sold shortly, and an additional hotel constructed on the property. The Hodges Bay Club will also be resuscitated. The Half Moon Bay Hotel has attracted new interests with a great likelihood of it being resurrected. The Halcyon Cove, the Morris Bay property, Guiana Island and its environs, will also see significant injections of new capital as developers race to make the best of the energy and drive of the new administration.

The inner St. John's Harbour will be improved significantly. Dredging and sweeping of the channels and turning basins will commence before the 2015 tourism season, and will end before many of the megaships begin to set sail. The St. John's Harbour and the lands encasing the inland sea will be transformed. A boardwalk, shops, restaurants, and a hotel are to be constructed on the seafront making the area far more picturesque and economically vibrant. My Government will transform the Point area and turn a run-down neighborhood into a vibrant economic zone.

Falmouth Harbour will also be developed, preceded by consultations between Government and the environmentalists. There will be no harm inflicted on the fragile environment, as my Government races to develop. At Nelson's Dockyard, my Government intends to create a ***New Economic Development Zone***. That newly-legislated Zone will encourage very low-density winter housing, not unlike the successful

yacht and boat basin, witnessed by members of my Government, around the island of Sardinia, close to the Italian mainland.

New models of development and the application of creative new ideas are required for success; and, my Government will be doing all that is necessary to attract new investments by the application of innovative ideas. Economic growth and new jobs will come from new investments that are imperative, if the nation is to outgrow its fiscal and economic challenges.

Antigua and Barbuda intends to be ready, and my Government is ready to rebuild both Antigua and our sister-isle of Barbuda.

Madame President and Members of the Senate:

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

My Government intends to make Barbuda a net contributor to Government's finances. Barbuda will be made a Port of Entry. Customs and Immigration officials will have a permanent place there. Additionally, we have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with a developer to build a new hotel; to erect housing that matches the standard created for guests; to create a yacht basin; to construct a new airport terminal and runway, a golf course, restaurants, shops and other tourism amenities. Barbuda is about to become a net contributor to the Government's finances, able to support its own workforce by income generated from services.

My Government acknowledges that outstanding wages and salaries are owed to employees of the Barbuda Council. Those unpaid workers are given the assurance that both short-term and long-term solutions to that challenge are actively being pursued. More than five million dollars are being set aside specifically to solve the outstanding payments to workers employed by the Council. By creating the new projects and

resuscitating several of the existing hotels that are shuttered, my Government, with the leadership of the Minister of Barbuda Affairs, will make Barbuda the paradise it can be.

It pleases me to inform that my Government will be making Barbuda a completely green-energy island. Solar panels and wind-powered turbines will reduce significantly the dependence of the Barbudan community on fossil-fuel produced electricity. The switch to 100% green energy will make Barbuda unique in the world.

The attention in the marketplace, that has caused Antigua and Barbuda to attract new investments, has been triggered by the swiftness with which decisions are made. The seamless flow of review and authorization has replaced the sluggishness that once characterized the decision-making process of the past. My Government is ready for business and Antigua and Barbuda is preparing to fix its broken parts. A new dispensation now rules.

Madame President and Members of the Senate:

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

In Antigua, my Government is also aiming to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels to produce the electricity that we need. By the year 2019, or in five years, my Government intends to rely upon green energy to produce 20% of all electricity consumed. Government schools, office buildings, government institutions and street lighting will gradually convert to green energy sources, lessening our dependence on imported and expensive fossil fuels.

The revolution of 2014, my Government believes, will be marked by the availability of new sources of energy, all environmentally friendly. In 1948, sixty-six years ago, only a handful of homes in St. John's and at the Antigua Sugar Factory utilized electric power. Even then, during the

youthful days of my father, the limited electricity supply was provided for use at night only. Lamplight, battery-powered flashlights and flambeaus were the artificial lights relied-upon by the vast majority, at night.

The acquisition by the Government of the power plant, in 1948, coupled with the pledge by the AT&LU Political Committee to make electricity available island-wide, succeeded in creating a new Antigua by 1968—two decades later. In 2014, my Government is pledging to create yet another modern Antigua and Barbuda, to be defined in part by reliance on new energy sources. Antigua and Barbuda will be taking the lead, yet again!

My Government will amalgamate all the energy companies into a single entity to be called ***The National Energy Company***. The object is to ensure that energy production and consumption are managed holistically, and not in a piecemeal fashion. We will be moving forward with a single plan, in 2014, just as the Government did in 1952.

Sixty-two years ago, in 1952, the Parliament passed ***The Hotels Aid Ordinance Act***. That law successfully established uniformity in the emerging new hotel industry and it brought the Antigua and Barbuda people tremendous success. Energy production will be handled in a similar fashion with successful outcomes, in due course. My Government will reduce the carbon footprint and undertake those courses of action that will see us acting to reduce the impact of global climate change, just as promised.

Madame President and Members of the Senate:

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

One of the important promises made by my Government is the elimination of personal income tax. After 28 years without such a tax, commencing in 1976, personal income tax was re-introduced in April

2005. An increase in Government revenues resulted at first; however, the data will show that a decline in economic activity followed by 2009.

Accepting an analysis of the harmful effects of personal income tax, published in April 2014, my Government remains committed to eliminating Personal Income Tax and making Antigua and Barbuda a low-tax jurisdiction. No precise date for the elimination of personal income tax has yet been set; however, certain benchmarks are being utilized to determine the most prudent time when the tax will be responsibly eliminated. My Government will manage intelligently.

Madame President and Members of the Senate:

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

My Government has also stepped into the breach created at the Mount St. John Medical Center by applying great intelligence to the challenges posed. It has repealed the policy of denying birth certificates to newly-born citizens, because their parents are unable to meet the cost of the hospitalization during delivery. That policy offended the law. Its reversal has drawn applause from the United Nations where the Minister of Health proudly announced the implementation of the promise made and kept.

A new MRI machine is also being brought into the lone Government-owned hospital, reducing significantly the cost of the service to patients requiring this particularly useful diagnostic tool. My Government is also addressing the wait at the Emergency Room for patients; guarantees of much shorter waiting times will be achieved shortly.

My Government extends its thanks to the People's Republic of China for agreeing to send a team of eye surgeons to Antigua that will engage in cataract removal. The diagnostic machines, upon which the surgeons

will rely, are to become the property of the Mount St. John Medical Center when the team returns to China.

My Government has also decided to bring to the very first sitting of the Parliament on Monday, August 18 2014, ratification of ***The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities***. My Government will shortly demonstrate its commitment to those persons with disabilities by naming, as its new Ambassador to an important capital, an exceedingly intelligent person who has a physical disability. My Government's commitment will be more than words. My Government will also act on its pledges and turn its words into action. The results of my Government's decision-making will impress even the blind and hostile, the successful and the failures.

Madame President and Members of the Senate:

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

Test Cricket will be returning to Antigua in April next year, after a very long absence, occasioned by sand. The Sir Vivian Richards Stadium will come alive when the West Indies battle England in the latter's tour of the Caribbean region. Thousands of Britons are expected to follow their team to Antigua, filling the hotels, the restaurants, and the taxicabs just when the tourism season has come to an end next April 2015. My Government intends to return Antigua and Barbuda and its cricketers to greatness.

The Sir Vivian Richards Stadium and its environs will also be turned into a ***Corporate Free Zone***. Corporations that choose to build their headquarters in the area surrounding the Stadium will be treated as though they are located outside of Antigua and Barbuda, for purposes of taxes and other government charges. The West Indies Cricket Board, already enjoying the status of an Embassy, will soon begin to build its new Headquarters building within this ***Corporate Free Zone***. My

Government will actively market this Zone and thereby turn a white elephant, very infrequently utilized, into an area of tremendous economic activity and worth. My Government views this overarching approach as another of its innovative plans to tackle unemployment.

No other challenge is as perilous as is unemployment. Failure is not an option. Every able-bodied adult who wants a job must be able to find one. That is the Antigua and Barbuda my Government envisions.

Madame President and Members of the Senate:

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

The young men who choose to commit crimes with firearms are a worry. The decades-long effort to reduce illegal firearms possessed by criminals, resulting in the offers of amnesties, has barely made a dent in violent attacks on innocent homeowners, gas stations, shopkeepers, and pedestrians.

My Government will invest in the acquisition of police dogs, trained to sniff-out both illicit drugs and firearms. My Government will fix the Police Headquarters and other police stations where police officers are housed, in order to increase the sense of high regard and high esteem that are connected with being a police officer. More training and better equipment will also be provided. And, those unsolved crimes that are stopped in their tracks because of the lack of finance will become a problem of yesteryear.

My Government intends to provide the most vulnerable with protective services, and to reduce the criminal element across the nation.

By making many new jobs available, especially in construction, repairs of yachts, automobile body and engine repairs, and other kinds of jobs that are usually dominated by young males, my Government believes

that it will be successfully battling crime. However, my Government will go one step further.

The 1950 law which enables Magistrates and Judges to impose alternatives to custodial sentences will be amended on Monday, August 18 2014. Instead of crowding the jail with those caught smoking or possessing small quantities of marijuana, Magistrates and Judges will have the option of imposing hours of community work, or compelling attendance at remedial classes.

Under the amended legislation, my Government intends to ensure that pardons can also be more easily issued to non-violent convicted criminals who are willing to seek out employment, and to turn their lives around. My Government intends to reduce the prison population and to end the overcrowding and idleness, the unsanitary working and living conditions that affect prison officers and prisoners alike, at Her Majesty's Prison. The Prime Minister has already proposed an amnesty for young men who have committed minor crimes, non-violent, and non-egregious.

Madame President and Members of the Senate:

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

The object today is to provide a broad perspective on the future plans of my Government. The plan, in a nutshell, is to transform Antigua and Barbuda into a harmonious, prosperous and modern nation, making it an economic powerhouse in the Caribbean. My Government is filled with enthusiasm, drive and energy towards achieving full employment, towards ensuring the equitable distribution of wealth, and towards providing equality of opportunity and justice.

It is my Government's intention to demonstrate success by action, not by words. The path ahead is to be filled with opportunity and the creation of new wealth. Every citizen and resident of Antigua and

Barbuda will have the opportunity to improve his or her life chances, and to make the personal future of his and her family better than it ever was.

Long live the Antigua and Barbuda nation. Long live the Antigua and Barbuda people. May God's guiding hand continue to instruct the leadership of this great little country of ours.

Madame President and Members of the Senate:

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

I thank you.