



His Excellency Sir Rodney Williams, KCMG

Governor-General of Antigua and Barbuda

Delivers the Speech from the Throne

EXPANDING OUR WEALTH:

UNITING TO CREATE AN ECONOMIC POWERHOUSE

Thursday, January 18, 2018
Parliament Building
Queen Elizabeth Highway
St. John's, ANTIGUA and BARBUDA

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

Good morning. I wish each of you the very best of health and unmatched prosperity during the New Year; and, I pray God's richest blessings upon our nation in the year 2018. My Government assures the people of Antigua and Barbuda that this is a year when rebuilding will be intensified. 2018 will be a year when there is the greatest need for unity of purpose among our people. In order to expand our nation's wealth, the people of Antigua and Barbuda must join hearts and minds, moving the economic powerhouse beyond its foundation stage. No-one is to be left behind.

My Government regrets that Minister Eustace 'Teco' Lake, the Parliamentary Representative for St. John's Rural South, cannot be seated in this chamber today. The reports are that he is making himself sufficiently strong to undergo a kidney transplant. We all wish him well.

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

2018 is the year in which a University of the West Indies landed-campus will likely open its doors in Antigua, welcoming students from all across the region. The UWI Five Islands Campus, coming four years after the new administration has taken office, is the clearest indicator of my Government's growing investment in the future well-being of the youth of Antigua and Barbuda.

Tertiary education, my Government reminds, is not for the purpose of creating an elite. Those who receive education and training are expected to give according to their talents, helping to create new wealth, new knowledge and new opportunities for themselves and all others in the years following their graduation.

In every jurisdiction where a Law School exists in our Commonwealth Caribbean, the training of new lawyers requires their participation in civil and criminal court cases in the jurisdiction. My Government is negotiating for a School of Law to become another school within the UWI Five Islands Campus. The object is to fill a demand that already exists, bearing in mind that newly-minted lawyers can start

their careers by participation in cases right here in Antigua and Barbuda. In times past, Antigua and Barbuda was an exporter of teachers. In the near future, our country will become an exporter of lawyers.

The economic forecast in the year 2018 is for healthy growth, record levels of employment, and the continued lowering of taxes—despite Hurricane Irma and its impact on our country’s revenues during the year just ended.

My Government has set about to create more wealth, more economic opportunities, easier access to job-training and to tertiary education, a healthier population for our families, living in safer communities, and improved infrastructure everywhere to enable the wealth-multiplier to operate efficiently in Antigua and Barbuda. These elementary conditions, my Government acknowledges, are required to build and to maintain our Caribbean economic powerhouse.

One of the elements relied upon to create new wealth, for the well-being of all of us, is the Citizenship by Investment Program (CIP). That revenue-raiser constitutes as much as 15% of the Treasury’s intake, annually. Recently, my Government has had to reduce the amounts charged under the National Development Fund and certain fees, in order to make the CIP more competitive. The impact on overall revenue, my Government is pleased to report, has been to return the CIP to acceptable levels of income.

As the CIP creates new wealth for our people, my Government aims to make Barbuda a net contributor to the Treasury of Antigua and Barbuda. For that reason, my Government took to Parliament *The Barbuda Land (Amendment) Act 2017*. It is my Government’s conviction that the rehabilitation of Barbuda, including the rebuilding of at least 400 severely damaged or destroyed homes, requires Barbudan ownership of the land on which these houses sit.

My Government embraces the visionary thinking expressed by the Nobel Economics Prize nominee—the celebrated Peruvian Professor who has carried-on where Sir Arthur Lewis left off—delving into development economics. Professor Hernando de Soto has written that “dead wealth”—or property owned by the poor all over the world without formal title to their land—can only be transformed by endowing the owners with title that has legal worth. Following passage of *The*

Barbuda Land (Amendment) Act 2017, the amended law will cause legal title to land to be issued to homeowners in Barbuda. Going forward, my Government believes that Barbuda will become a net contributor to the Treasury, generating opportunities for Barbudan families and youth.

All states must find solutions to their challenges that are peculiar to their own history. The challenge of Barbuda, following Hurricane Irma and the evacuation of its residents to Antigua, required innovation to bring prosperity and a lasting solution. My Government chose innovation and a change in historical direction. A new airport and runway, a new seaport and improved roadways, will change the economic circumstances. New hotels and even a new town will transform Barbuda, increasing the probability of greater incomes for the people resident on Barbuda.

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

My Government is choosing to turn the corner on bringing greater justice to the people of Antigua and Barbuda, especially those of limited means whose collision with the courts and legal representation can be daunting and far too costly. For these reasons, a *Legal Aid Clinic* has been inaugurated; it will allow representation of people of limited means by Government-paid attorneys. This representation will not only be in criminal matters, but also in those areas having to do with small estates, landlord/tenant and when the indigent wish to challenge the state.

The Public Prosecutions Service will also be inaugurated in 2018, removing the police as prosecutors; each file and the task of determining the probability of the evidence to prevail will now be placed in the hands of the constitutionally-created Director of Public Prosecutions (the DPP). Justice will be better served, my Government believes.

The inauguration of a *Sexual Offenses Court*, funded by international organizations and supervised by the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ), will shortly be a new reality. The Ministry of Legal Affairs is making many innovations that will inure to the benefit of the people of Antigua and Barbuda.

My Government recognizes that present among us—the population of Antigua and Barbuda—are citizens who are differently-abled. It is the responsibility of the State to ensure that these citizens are provided every reasonable opportunity to function and to succeed in a challenging environment. My Government recommits to the legislation the Parliament has recently adopted, to the United Nations Convention, and pledges to enforce the law in its entirety, promoting the rights of the differently-abled.

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

Promoting the exports of Antigua and Barbuda is another of the tasks which my Government continues to pursue. Antigua and Barbuda plans to be a producer and an exporter of brewed beer. The old beer factory at Crabbes is being resuscitated, thanks to the drive of the Leader Emeritus. Antigua and Barbuda will begin production, later this year, of a new brand of beer that will also be exported to other Caribbean countries.

My Government, having come to office following the transfer of Wadadli Beer production to St. Vincent, determined that a factory generating jobs and a local product is a necessity. This challenge was taken-up by the former Prime Minister who was also responsible for the presence of the first factory. Although retiring from elective politics, my Government intends to ensure that this living treasure trove of institutional knowledge continues to be actively engaged.

Beer production requires water in abundance. My Government is pleased to report that the APUA can now produce more than 8,000,000 (eight million) gallons of potable water daily. The challenge of a sufficiency of supply of potable water, encountered when my Government took office in 2014, has now been conquered. The APUA water-producing capacity has more than doubled since 2014, and the desalting plant formerly owned by Sembcorp, a private operator, has become the property of the APUA.

As the economy continues to grow and sectors expand, several commodities are inexorably consumed in greater quantities. Potable water and electricity are two

such necessities; water and electricity consumption react to—and serve as—sensitive barometers of growth. The APUA has agreed to resuscitate the 30 megawatt Wadadli Power Plant so that it too can contribute to the growing demand for more electricity. Nevertheless, it is the intention of my Government to increase reliance upon renewable energy, while eschewing any further investments in fossil fuel plants. For this reason, solar power plants will begin to sprout in diverse places—as substitutes for fossil-fuel based energy—to meet growth demands.

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

In order to respond to the growth in demand for dialysis services at the Mount St. John Medical Center, my Government embarked upon an ambitious program to transplant kidneys. However, the number of patients requiring dialysis continues to grow; the expansion of the dialysis unit is the inevitable path upon which my Government will embark. The tentative plan is to rehabilitate the Edward Ward at the old Holberton Hospital, increasing significantly the number of machines that the dialysis unit can accommodate.

Kidney failure is a non-communicable disease; others, such as diabetes, hypertension, breast and prostate cancer, can be successfully addressed by early intervention and by changes in lifestyle. The campaign to raise the awareness of the Antigua and Barbuda public, conducted by my Government and several NGOs, is reaching thousands of our citizens and residents. The long-term impact will redound to the benefit of families and their breadwinners who may otherwise be struck down prematurely.

My Government is nevertheless aware many illnesses can attack healthy bodies without notice, and can severely impact a family's resources. At the moment, the Medical Benefits Scheme provides coverage for a very limited number of diseases. My Government intends to address the shortcomings of the MBS by introducing a National Health Insurance Plan. Our residents and citizens who require medical intervention outside of the expertise readily available at the nation's public health system, may be assured that a National Health Insurance plan will successfully provide expanded coverage. The implications of this additional level of protection

from the unplanned expenses which sickness may inflict can only be welcomed by the wise, my Government believes.

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

The quality of our roads must begin to match the high standard achieved by our healthcare. After inheriting a road system on which \$1,000,000,000 (one billion dollars) were spent over a ten-year period, the rapid deterioration of road surfaces following recent rains attest to the poor quality of the materials and applied engineering. My Government is determined to ensure that our roads are better built, that potholes disappear, that their surfaces are fixed, and that the roads of Antigua and Barbuda are of equal quality as well-built roads in other Caribbean countries.

The Ministry of Works will be allocated more than \$200,000,000 (two hundred million dollars) over the coming years for the exclusive purpose of spending on the rehabilitation of our highways, roadways, community and village roads. Having reduced taxes on the importation of more than 6,000 (six thousand) vehicles over these past three years, my Government will take that single necessary step to increase the life of your cars, buses, taxis and SUVs—we will repair the roads.

The purchase of a vehicle is deemed a capital investment. The only other capital purchase a family will make, that is likely to exceed that capital investment, is acquisition of a home. My Government's pledge to complete 500 homes will be met by the end of 2018. Resources that were initially targeted for the housing program had to be diverted to meet a range of other challenges that could not have been forecast.

For example, the National Housing Development and Urban Renewal Company spent its money on repairing the National Archives; on the Dockyard Police Station; on the Coast Guard Buildings at the Deepwater Harbour; on the Library at the State College; renovated the old Administration building on High Street; on other badly-needed government-owned buildings that required carpenters, masons, plumbers and electricians who could not otherwise be quickly dispatched. At the moment, 20 private homes are being constructed on private lands by the National Housing;

the homeowners procured mortgages for these buildings and National Housing is paid on a completion schedule. My Government thanks the workers at National Housing for their commitment to excellence.

In the coming months, National Housing will focus upon finishing the 148 homes at Denfields and the 160 homes at Paynters that are more than 80% complete. The company will also turn its attention to Lightfoot, to the Friars Hill and Marble Hill lands acquired through the WIOC purchase, where more than 100 homes will be built. Simultaneously, the Shoul lands at Royalls Estate that have been purchased by my Government will also have homes built thereon, to be sold at very reasonable prices. The homeowners at Dredge Bay can attest to the valuation of their homes, and the significant difference between the purchase price and the estimated value. My Government has been very generous to these first-time homeowners, and will continue this policy at the arious sites.

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

The generosity of my Government has also been very evident in the sponsorship of cricket, football, basketball, volleyball, track and field, swimming and other sporting competition and events. In fact, my Government is collaborating with the Pan American Sports Organization, making an investment in the improvement of the YASCO track that will cost more than \$1,770,000 (one million seven hundred and seventy thousand dollars). The cost of the other civil works that are to be undertaken at YASCO will be borne by my Government. An unfinished bathroom and change rooms, partially constructed more than seven years ago, at an estimated cost of \$620,000, is likely to be demolished.

At the Sir Vivian Richards Cricket Stadium, my Government hosted approximately 200 Barbudan evacuees for nearly 16 weeks. This versatile use of the Stadium was brought on by tragic necessity; the victims' departure to the Nurses' Hostel eighteen days ago is not the end of the tragedy. The disaster that was Hurricane Irma, my Government reminds, has not yet ended. The cost of the repairs to the previously occupied spaces at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium is estimated at \$179,861.00. The Stadium is being readied for a required inspection, to be followed by engagement of Super-50 games and Test matches. The management and staff

at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium are to be applauded for their generosity of spirit. Tolerance by the evacuees, under the circumstances, wins this group of citizens our commendations.

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

My Government accepts that the challenges requiring our defense of the most vulnerable Antigua and Barbuda citizens are unending. Congenital diseases, birth defects and accidents that significantly impact the mobility and learning abilities of our sons and daughters, will always be with us. Those who are differently-abled need to be integrated into our Caribbean civilization as seamlessly as possible. The Parliament has ratified *the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities*; its implementation requires the vigilance of every able-bodied person in Antigua and Barbuda.

My Government also seeks greater efficiencies by combining bodies that have common but differentiated goals. *The Community Development Division* has been merged with the *Local Government Department*. The greater pooling of resources has resulted in a larger impact at the community level, and better coordination with NGOs. *The Directorate of Gender Affairs* has merged with the *Department of Youth Affairs*; the blending has resulted in greater cohesiveness and better resource management. My Government has pursued these strategies in order to streamline functions and operations, resulting in greater overall efficiencies.

The National Office of Disaster Services (NODS) also falls under the Ministry of Social Transformation. This past hurricane season, beginning in June 2017, has been the busiest and most challenging for NODS and the entire nation. Since 1995, or for 22 years, no hurricane season has been as destructive, my Government believes. Following the passage of Hurricanes Irma and Maria in the first weeks of September 2017, the NODS systems were severely tested.

My Government applauds the managers, supervisors and workers at NODS for willingly undertaking the Herculean tasks which the natural disasters required of them. They successfully delivered truckloads of food, laden pallets of tarpaulin, forty-foot containers of plywood sheets, stacks of corrugated galvanize, varied

building supplies, heavy duty equipment, trucks and other machinery to Codrington, Barbuda, and all across Antigua. Had NODS not existed, my Government would have had to invent it.

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

Certainly, there existed no playbook on the evacuation of an entire population from an island in the Caribbean because of a threatening hurricane, following in the path of a Category 5++ storm. When Hurricane Jose seemed to be tracking the same coordinates as Hurricane Irma before it, the desperation to save the lives of our Barbudan brethren summoned strength, courage and imagination in the leaders of my Government.

With the help of the Venezuelan Air Force, the Captain of the tug who towed the barge, the crew of the Excellence, the Captain of the Barbuda Express, operators of many small sailing craft and aircraft, 1800 Barbudans were successfully evacuated to Antigua when a second dangerous storm threatened. Although young John Francis Jr. lost his life during the passage of Irma, no-one was injured during the evacuation. The operation was undertaken with precision and with generosity of heart and spirit. My Government applauds all those brave men and women for the selflessness displayed in the face of grave danger.

Similarly, my Government applauds the Royal Police Force, the Antigua and Barbuda Defence Force, the Waitte Foundation, the Samaritan's Purse, the Bonnie Floyd Ministries, the many churches in Antigua and elsewhere, the NGOs, the private individuals, the many foreign governments, and the thousands of strangers in many countries who gave selflessly in order to help us through this disaster and its aftermath. My Government expresses its heartfelt thanks for the outpouring of support.

Whatever our disagreements as we move forward, everyone wishes for the best. With God's help and the wisdom of the Antigua and Barbuda people, my Government is certain that Barbuda has a bright future. A new six-thousand-foot runway and air terminal, planned before the Hurricane Irma, will sprout from the forest. A new seaport and finger pier will also be constructed, in order to

accommodate large cargo and cruise vessels, entering Barbuda from foreign ports. Two new hotels, valued at about US\$500,000,000 (one-half billion United States dollars) will also be constructed on Barbuda. A new town, based on a proposal put forward by a Barbudan architect/engineer, will also take root in due course.

Barbuda has a bright future, my Government believes. Its sons and daughters can aspire to achieve outstandingly when the economy of Barbuda, set upon a new path, begins to create new wealth and new revenue that will allow for new possibilities. My Government applauds the elected leaders of Barbuda for resisting the naysayers and the purveyors of fear, who may wish to keep our Barbudan brethren in perpetual under-development for selfish reasons. We are building a new Barbuda. The world is now a village; and, Barbuda, like its big sister Antigua, has to shed those norms that confine its people to mediocrity.

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

My Government believes that the revolution in telecommunications has transformed our world into a village. The availability of the World Wide Web and the Internet in every nook and cranny, the world over, has altered the relationship between the metropole and the periphery. The world's storehouses of knowledge are now available to those who, fifty years ago, were colonial subjects of powerful states. The equation has been altered irrevocably, my Government believes.

My Government celebrates with the APUA for attracting many clever and trained experts who have designed systems that enable the wealth of the nation to be largely retained. While competition and innovation are required to spur excellence, an enabling environment that is based in law must regulate the actions of the parties. *The Telecommunications Bill*, to be piloted by our Parliament's most seasoned expert in the field, will be brought forward in this session. It will encourage competition, level the playing field, and increase the profitability of all the players, my Government has concluded. It strives for innovation.

The innovation, excellence and outstanding performance, which ABS Television and Radio have demonstrated in the recent past, are measurable by its 60,000 followers on Facebook. The ABS Facebook page had 750,000 views when the Prime Minister

visited Barbuda during the aftermath of Hurricane Irma. ABS has considerable appeal beyond the borders of Antigua and Barbuda, as well. My Government congratulates all those who have brought a freshness to the viewing and listening publics—on the World Wide Web, Cable television and regular broadcast—choosing ABS over so many other competitors, local and international.

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

One factor which rates highly in the transformation of our national broadcast system is training. Formal higher education, pursued by hosts of Antigua and Barbuda's young men and women, has catapulted our performance standards to higher levels.

Education continues to play the expected role envisioned by our forebears. For this reason, my Government has moved to increase the number of classrooms and teachers to meet the demands of our previously-crowded secondary schools. The Antigua Girls High School, the Clare Hall Secondary School, the Jennings Secondary School, the All Saints Secondary School and the Princess Margaret School were all enlarged by the addition of more classrooms.

Additionally, when growth projections showed the need for even more classroom space, the Sir Novelle Richards Secondary School was built this past Summer in two months and one week. It was a record performance. 151 students have begun their secondary education there. As this year's entering students move to the next grade, the incoming students will fill the seats vacated by the advancing class. The movement of students each year into the school will eventually result in the graduation of the first batch in five years. This system is well-thought-out.

The Education Levy, an innovation in education-financing of an earlier administration, in 1994, has set Antigua and Barbuda apart from other states and created a model for many to adopt.

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

The tourism model which was adopted by the Legislative Assembly in Antigua in 1952, or 65 years ago, continues to bring prosperity to our Caribbean island-country today. The number of new hotels under construction at present, and the expansion of existing properties, form the basis of the marvelous economic growth witnessed since 2014. Success is never an accident, my Government believes.

The Hodges Bay Club is likely to throw open its doors in a few months. The abandoned *Sunsail Club Colonna* is coming back on stream this year; repair work is on-going. *The Rex Halcyon* is to be expanded and upgraded. *The Royal Antiguan* is being completely refurbished by the Sunwing Group. A 350-room *Royalton Hotel* will also spring to life across from the Royal Antiguan, on the north side of the lagoon. More than 200 new rooms will be added to the stock when *the Hyatt* is built on the site where the Yeptons Villas once stood. *The Valley Church Beach Hotel* will be under construction in a few months. *The Tamarind Hills* 48 villa-expansion project is underway, with all villas pre-sold. *The Callaloo Quay* construction site, to become the home of *the Waldorf Hotel*, has already begun just outside Old Road. *The NonSuch Bay* expansion is beyond the planning stages. *The Verandah Hotel* is expanding; *the Pineapple Beach* is under construction, attesting to the faith of the current hotelier in the viability of the Antigua and Barbuda tourism product. The old *Half Moon Bay Hotel*, in contention since 1995, or for 22 years, is being demolished; *the Replay Group* has purchased the derelict property for US\$23 million dollars. My Government still owes interest payments of US\$20 million dollars. *The YIDA project* at Crabbes is under construction, despite the unhelpful claims made by his detractors. On Barbuda, *the Paradise Found* project by Robert DiNero is moving forward, as is *the PLH Hotel Project* by John Paul DeJoria. The destruction of the hotels on Barbuda by Hurricane Irma, including the 50 year-old *Coco Point Lodge*, presents an opportunity for realizing economic benefit by those who can calculate risks. The new runway, finger pier and seaport, and other infrastructural projects which Barbuda will realize this year, represent a calculated risk taken by my Government. My Government is betting that a new Barbuda will rise like a phoenix from Irma's ashes. Creating new hotel projects by more foreign direct investment is the mandate given to my Government by the people of Antigua and Barbuda. The mantra is jobs, jobs, jobs!

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

My Government is determined to increase the nation's agricultural output. Several priority areas will receive the attention of experts within the Ministry and of others who will come from afar. A Cuban Technical Brigade has arrived here and has begun to implement projects aimed at expanding pineapple production, pork and poultry production, tree crop and root crop and honey production. In collaboration with the Government of Mexico, a disease resistant variety of coconut will be introduced across Antigua. The People's Republic of China will dispatch an eleven-person team to teach various methods of greenhouse and open-field production; China will provide the greenhouses. The Plant Protection Unit will be expanded to pursue invasive species, with special emphasis on the Giant African Snail. The success of farmers will be determined by their own efforts and by the contributions of my Government.

A most important mandate handed to my Government by the people of Antigua and Barbuda is to secure our country's environment. That ambition does not translate into fear of managing our mangroves and our shorelines. The expectation of the people of Antigua and Barbuda is that intelligent decision-making, informed by experts who understand environmental sciences, will guide my Government's actions.

The climate change phenomenon is of grave concern to my Government and requires the cooperation of the global community to enable us to save our reefs, our shoreline and our sand dunes. The ferocious storms, packing sustained winds exceeding 150 mph, can destroy those protective mechanisms placed in the path of the wave energy by Mother Nature. While we can build more resilient homes, our scientists must also find intelligent systems to keep our shorelines from disappearing.

Intelligent decision-making also applies to managing immigration. Workers move from their own countries to ours because of the outstanding performance of Antigua and Barbuda's economy, history has shown. Immigrants travel to places where jobs are available, just like Desert Nomads traveled to places where water can be found. Having spent seven years in Antigua and Barbuda immigrants

become eligible for citizenship, just as the Constitution of 1981 allows. My Government has welcomed more new citizens since 2014, than the other administration granted in its ten years. We are building one nation and diversifying the gene pool.

Antigua and Barbuda has no enemies. Our peaceful island-state pursues comity among all states because peace is good for our business. Good relations with our developmental partners continue to define the foreign policy of Antigua and Barbuda.

The special relationship which Antigua and Barbuda enjoys with China, Venezuela, and Cuba cannot be overstated. These three states have placed permanent embassies on our soil and assigned ambassadors to our capital. On Monday, my Government held a groundbreaking ceremony with a Chinese firm to build a new seaport at Rat Island. It will cost almost US\$90,000,000 (ninety million United States dollars). My Government thanks the People's Republic of China for its continued faith in our abilities to meet our obligations. My Government also informs that scores of Antigua and Barbuda students are now studying in China. Our thanks to Ambassador Wang and his government for their sincerity.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela continues to provide support through the PetroCaribe Initiative; and, negotiations have begun to settle the sum owed by a massive reduction of Antigua and Barbuda's liability to this South American country. Venezuela is experiencing its own difficulties, yet chooses to give a helping hand before and after the devastating hurricanes this past summer. Our thanks to the Venezuelan Air Force for saving the lives of many of our Barbudan brethren. Our thanks to Ambassador Peres for his leadership.

The Republic of Cuba continues to send us expertise through several brigades, including the medical brigade of doctors, nurses, pharmacists and other professionals. More than 25 Cuban builders spent in excess of one month in Barbuda helping to rebuild government buildings and other infrastructure adversely impacted by Hurricane Irma. Cuban electricians also assisted in replacing the KV9 line that carries electricity from the plants at Crabbes to our homes and businesses. Cuba also has extended scholarships to scores of our youth annually who have consistently returned to improve our human resource base. Our thanks to Ambassador Olivares and his government for their generosity.

My Government is thankful to these partners for the very special role which they continue to play in our development.

The United States and the United Kingdom are traditional partners that have remained very friendly and very helpful, my Government asserts. The US SouthCom is currently rebuilding the NODS Headquarters on American Road. The UK has pledged £13.9 million Pounds Sterling to rehabilitate two important highways on Antigua. Canada has welcomed many Antigua and Barbuda students since the 1960s. Under its bilateral assistance program, Canada provided both school plants and teachers to Antigua and Barbuda. Canada has never ceased to collaborate on very important issues in several multilateral fora, despite its recent imposition of a visa requirement on citizens of Antigua and Barbuda entering its borders. Japan will build a desalting plant in Bethesda, producing 4,000 gallons of water daily to the benefit of farmers. The European Union will provide Five Million Euros for unforeseen needs; the amount has been earmarked for repairs to homes in Barbuda—though it had to be routed through the UNDP on account of negative press, emanating from political activists who deliberately spread false claims. The European Development Fund/National Indicative Programme has also allocated three million Euros for Antigua and Barbuda in 2018.

Antigua and Barbuda has found willing allies in many states that are thousands of miles distant. Brazil, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Israel, Jordan and others continue to collaborate with Antigua and Barbuda to achieve significant goals.

The relations with the OECS and CARICOM, the OAS and the United Nations, the Commonwealth of Nations and the African Union cannot be overstated. My Government's relations with multilateral institutions continue to drive its foreign policy since they generate opportunities for shaping our world.

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

My Government continues to pursue a zero tolerance policy for criminal activities. Crime continues to be successfully tackled by a multiplicity of systems, not the least

of which is the threat by the state of punitive action when caught. The Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda has been strengthened; the complaint of insufficient vehicles to get to homes and business places where crimes are taking place, is gone. Rapid response teams and roving patrols are the bane of criminals. Illegal guns that are seized will cost those in possession dearly; they will be required to serve a mandatory jail sentence. There is no sympathy for criminals. While my Government will do its best to engage prisoners in rehabilitative work, and to provide some skills training, those who commit crimes, especially with unlawful firearms, will be punished.

My Government expresses its appreciation to the Office of National Drug and Money Laundering Control Policy (ONDCP) for its continuous vigilance. Ten days ago, the ONDCP successfully interrupted the single largest unlawful transfer of cocaine in Antigua's history. It is not possible for law enforcement to abandon systems of deployment that work because criminals have chosen to unlawfully copy them. My Government seeks the understanding of the general public when these police actions take place on the streets and are witnessed by onlookers.

My Government will decriminalize possession of small quantities of marijuana. There is no wisdom in imposing a life sentence on young males who have no idea how far-reaching the effects of a conviction for marijuana possession will be. My Government discourages the use of the substance, but realizes that many youth will be denied travel and study opportunities later in life for having incurred an infraction, no matter how small the quantity.

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

My Government aims to expand considerably the quantum of wealth now extant within our borders. In 1981, the Gross National Product (GNP) of our island-country totaled US\$125,000,000 (one hundred and twenty-five million dollars). Today, 2018, three and one-half decades later, the GNP of Antigua and Barbuda is US\$1,500,000,000 (one billion five hundred million dollars). That amount is ten times the quantum at the start of our independence. The leaders of Antigua and Barbuda, after 1976, caused the Antigua and Barbuda economy to expand each year. The 1976ers knew what had to be done, like the 1939ers before them.

The Antigua and Barbuda families in the intervening years were able to build new homes and to repair existing homes; to send their children off to acquire tertiary education; to purchase consumables such as refrigerators, gas stoves, proper beds and mattresses. That is what wise housewives do with disposable incomes.

Travel and vacations, doctors' visits and bright white smiles become necessities, not optional, when incomes rise. More passports were issued annually to Antiguan and Barbudans than to their Windward Island counterparts with larger populations. Our men and women now live longer lives and better quality lives, when there is more wealth to share. These enviable results were possible because the Antigua and Barbuda people placed their reasonable faith in the elected officials for nearly three continuous decades. We were a unified nation, my Government believes. Success is the outcome of unity of purpose.

The Economic Powerhouse will emerge from unity of purpose and continued faith in the elected officials whom the people freely choose to act on their behalf. This is the lesson taught by the experience of the immediate historic past. Those who forget the lessons of history, my Government reminds, are condemned to repeating failures.

As a new future begins to appear on the horizon, my Government entreats its citizens and residents to consider wisely, to think deeply, and to learn from their parents, grandparents and ancestors. This is the year of decision-making.

May God bless us all. I thank you.