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Delivers the May 2026 Speech from the Throne

**BEGINNING A NEW ERA
IN
DEVELOPMENT AND PROSPERITY**

Tuesday, 26 May 2026
Parliament Building
Queen Elizabeth Highway
St. John's, ANTIGUA and BARBUDA

GOOD MORNING, EVERYONE.

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

Introduction

Six months ago, in November last year, I addressed a joint session of the Parliament. It pleases me to return to these hallowed halls less than a year later to address yet another joint session of the Parliament. I congratulate the new administration on its success at the polls, on 30th April, and extend heartiest best wishes to all parliamentarians who are now charged with commencing a new era in development and prosperity.

The people of Antigua and Barbuda have spoken; and, **the voice of the people is the voice of God**. Our democracy has withstood many turbulent events in years past. The actions of the entire population, during the recent weeks of campaigning by the political parties and independent candidates, were nothing short of exemplary. Not a single incident of vandalism or violence! The entire four-week experience casually exceeded the dignity and high regard usually attributed to mature democracies. We are a great nation!

As a sovereign and democratic nation, we can all boast of the wisdom of our electorate. Despite the overwhelming influence of youth—on the outcome of the contest, and in the pledges of the parties' future outlook—the expected destination of the nation of Antigua and Barbuda, my Government asserts, is to transform our island-State into a formidable economic power.

My Government is determined to foster a renaissance in education, health-care, housing, entrepreneurship, infrastructure, agriculture, investments, cultural expression and other facets of life. My Government has created very ambitious pathways to a renaissance—like, expanding the University of the West Indies at Five Islands, and turning Barbuda into a net contributor to wealth-creation. The

renaissance is intended to take our nation-State, by purpose and design, to lasting progress and prosperity.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

1. I turn to one of the most challenging portfolios that, without skillful management, could engulf our small-island developing State in geo-political battles that are not of our choosing: **Foreign Affairs**. All countries that are members of the United Nations have signed-on to the Charter of this 80-year old institution which was created to ensure that peace will reign on earth, and that nations can turn *“their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks.”* (From the Book of Isaiah Chapter 2, verse 4.)

2. There are two wars being waged by the strongest nations on earth, resulting in deaths in those affected countries and significant burdens being borne by small countries like ours:

(i). The Russian Federation and Ukraine began fighting each other more than four years ago, and many are the consequences for a Europe that last experienced war ending in 1945. As sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation caused its sale of energy products to decline, the price of fossil fuels globally began to rise.

(ii). When the USA and Israel launched attacks against Iran, and that country closed one of the sea lanes through which 20% of the world’s oil usually flows, the price of shipping, insurance, fuels and consumer goods also began to rise globally.

Small states, have played no role in starting these conflicts that have generated tough economic choices for the people of Antigua and Barbuda, the Caribbean, and the people of these two large states.

3. The management of our State’s Foreign Affairs by a very skillful Minister who increased his lead over his electoral opponent in the most recent poll, and who was re-appointed to this challenging portfolio, demonstrate the sound reasons why

faith is placed by my Government in the Honourable Paul Chet Greene, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Immigration. Congratulations, Honourable Minister!

4. In addition to our international affairs that must be skillfully managed, our island-State has been very much a part of a regional movement that goes back more than 80 years. The 1946 Manifesto of the AT&LU Political Committee speaks to Caribbean nationalism. The 1958 establishment of the West Indies Federation embodied the hopes and aspirations of a single Caribbean State. The 1965 CARIFTA free trade agreement among Barbados, Guyana and Antigua and Barbuda, spawned a larger movement in 1973 when the CARICOM was inaugurated. My Government views the CARICOM as essential to our island-nation's stability and prosperity. The several multilateral institutions created to meet the collective and individual needs of the CARICOM member-States, form a protective blanket that allows for collaboration and far-ranging security building measures. The future of the CARICOM is justly safeguarded by the leadership of our Minister of Foreign Affairs, my Government believes, and a commitment by its other 14 members to manage many of our challenges collectively.

Tourism

5. Since 1952, almost 75 years ago, when *The Hotels Aid Ordinance* was adopted by the *Legislative Council of the Presidency of Antigua in the Colony of the Leeward Islands*, our forebears bet on tourism. Sugarcane dominated, at that time; yet, the leaders—elected to the parliament seven-and-one-half decades ago—could envision tourism as an industry that would enrich the Antigua and Barbuda people. It was in hindsight an earlier “renaissance”; a fresh outlook that guided yesterday's leaders.

6. Today, more than 60% of the gross domestic product of Antigua and Barbuda is generated by tourism. *Tourism is Everybody's Business* we all now repeat. Therefore, my Government thanks the competent, intelligent, and affable Honourable Charles Max Fernandez for the superb leadership role he has played. He has presided over an expansion of the tourism product and offerings. More than 1,000,000 (one million) cruise passengers are likely to arrive during this season, and

more than 500,000 (five hundred thousand) overnight arrivals will fly into Antigua and Barbuda in this calendar year. The Minister has led a team of professionals whom together have advanced tourism to a new level. Congratulations!

7. The runway at the V.C. Bird International Airport is being repaired and strengthened. A new runway and air terminal have begun operation at the Burton-Nibbs International Airport in Barbuda. More than EC\$3,000,000,000 (three billion dollars) in investment have been generated for Barbuda; and, more roads, desalinating plants, new housing, a new village at Louie Hill, and a new school will soon cause a renaissance in Barbuda. No-one will be left behind in this new dispensation, my Government promises.

The Minister of State within the Ministry of Tourism, Civil Aviation, Transportation and Investment, the Honourable Michael Freeland, elected by an overwhelming majority in the St. George's Constituency, has begun to provide leadership and burden-sharing that tests his mettle and assures his constituents of success. Continued best wishes, Honourable Minister!

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Public Utilities: Water

8. One of the most daunting tasks faced by the Government of any small island developing-State is the provision of potable water for its inhabitants. When that task is made more difficult by persistent drought, by the vagaries of global climate change, by an elastic demand for more fresh water, then the task of meeting that demand can only be assigned to a Minister whose management experience prepared him for difficult assignments.

The Honourable Melford Nicholas, the most equipped of managers, has again been assigned the task of ensuring the provision of potable water to a population of residents, visiting tourists, cruise vessels, hotels, restaurants, hospitals, schools, farmers and all others with water needs.

9. My Government has increased the APUA supply of potable water from 3.5 million gallons daily, in 2014 when it first assumed office; to 11 million gallons daily, with the addition of four more reverse osmosis plants. Before the end of this calendar year, my Government will be providing 14 million gallons of potable water daily.

10. While the level of production of potable water has been satisfactory, the delivery of that water has proven problematic in several communities. Ageing pipes—that easily spring leaks and that break when pressure is increased—must be replaced. Those pipes are buried beneath streets and roadways in St. John’s and many villages. To replace the old pipes translates into destroying the roadways above them. Residents and motorists who need potable water delivered to their homes and businesses decry the dusty or muddy, uneven or potholed street surfaces that result, when new pipes are being buried. Every farmer knows, if you wish to plant crops, you must first plow the earth. My Government can only seek your patience while the Minister and his experts do their job. Thank you, Minister.

Ministry of Works

11. The quality of the roads and highways in Antigua has been improving, my Government asserts. The Sir George Walter Highway, the Friars Hill Roadway, the Sir Sidney Walling Highway, the Valley Road from Golden Grove to Old Road, the Parham to Wilikies Highway have all been recently repaired and are a pleasure on which to drive. All Saints Road is undergoing a renewal. These major roadways are among the first; simultaneously, the secondary roads within villages and communities are also being paved. A consortium of banks has agreed to advance \$150 million dollars against a small user-fee which each motorized vehicle is required to pay annually.

12. My Government expresses its sincerest thanks to the Minister of Works, the Honourable Maria Browne, for her management of a workforce that has performed admirably in the years since she assumed the role. The Director of Works and others on the team have provided quality leadership and examples that have inspired all rank-and-file to achieve highly for the multiple users of roadways, so pleased with the magnificent quality delivered. A shortage of cement has been a challenge; however, as the dredging of the channel leading to the silos at Crabbes

nears completion, that scarcity of cement will be of the past. The Ministry is very fortunate to have Minister Browne, the first female to serve as Minister of Works. She brings energy, competence, a determination to succeed, and positive thinking to every task which she is assigned. She is highly regarded by my Government. Our thanks to the leadership role played by the Minister of Works!

Minister of State, the Honourable Shenella Govia, bursting with energy and enthusiasm, has been re-assigned to the Ministry of Works. My Government's expectation is that the youthful Senator and Leader of Government Business in the Senate, will continue to strengthen the team at the Ministry and bring the nation closer to achieving the ambitious objectives set by my Government.

13. Another ambition has been the housing revolution which characterize my Government's 12 years in office. The National Housing and Urban Development Company and the Central Housing and Public Authority (CHAPA) have constructed more than 2,000 (two thousand) new homes in the period, and private contractors have also added significantly during those years. My Government forged ahead to succeed in meeting the demand for new housing; the irony is that success spawned even greater demand. My Government expresses its thanks to the Minister responsible for the housing success, knowing that even more is to be undertaken in the months ahead. Congrats!

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Education: Academic and Skills Training

14. When my Government decided upon establishing a University of the West Indies Campus in Antigua and Barbuda, there were those who scoffed at the presumptiveness of tiny Antigua and Barbuda proposing such a venture. There were those who thought that demanding payment of arrears, dating back decades, would deter my Government. Others who thought that by accusing the UWI of bending to political pressure, it would deter the decision-makers, and, if the UWI yielded, it would result in the deflation of its brand. Still others who argued that

buildings designed for a secondary school could not possibly be adequate for a university. My Government has proven the naysayers all wrong.

15. The UWI Five Islands Campus began life with a cohort of fewer than 350 students; four years later, nearly 2,000 students are enrolled in its various classes. It has begun to offer master degree programs, and will eventually offer PhD programs also. My Government is about to spend EC\$300 million on UWI's expansion, providing new Primary and Secondary Schools to the Five Islands community in the process. UWI is at the heart of the renaissance where tertiary education will be tuition-free for citizens; it will carve out from our human-resource base the newest version of what a re-birthing Antigua and Barbuda will look like.

16. The Minister of Education, Honourable Daryll Matthew, has delivered for the youth of Antigua and Barbuda and deserves our continuing applause. He has shown leadership, determination, strength and adherence to strong principles that result in the objectives which my Government and the UWI have set as benchmarks. Thank you, Minister.

17. Thanks also to Sir David Harrison. The ABICE—now a part of the ABCAS (*the Antigua and Barbuda College of Advanced Studies*)—will provide youth with training in the trades, allowing all to receive certification and to earn higher incomes on account of their training.

Agriculture and the Blue Economy

18. The purpose for creating an Antigua and Barbuda in 1632—nearly 400 years ago—was to grow tobacco and sugarcane; the industrial transformation of the grass-like plant into sugar crystals, and their export of boatloads of the substance to Europe, defined Antigua and Barbuda for nearly 350 years. A little more than 50 years ago, after 1972, sugarcane ceased to be grown in Antigua; tourism became the replacement industry.

19. Agriculture has remained an integral component of the economy; but, as tourism's impact grew, agriculture's share of the economy declined relatively. For decades, the best planners have sought to create linkages between tourism and agriculture. The success of this approach has now been placed in the capable hands

of one of the youngest, most daring members of the Cabinet. The new Minister of Agriculture, the Honourable Anthony Smith, has been handed an unenviable task, and my Government intends for him to succeed.

20. Many new tractors, other vehicles and equipment have been purchased by, or donated to, my Government as heightened efforts are made to ensure that appropriate assistance can be extended to farmers. Youthful farmers, requiring training and other assistance as they modernize the methods of producing food, are being supported.

21. My Government expresses its thanks to the People's Republic of China for sending agricultural experts to Antigua and for flying many farmers to China, in order for our farmers to witness and to learn from the new methods that are being utilized to boost production. My Government is acting in furtherance of the objective of achieving greater food security, despite the many challenges which this small state faces. Modernizing methods of growing food, including greenhouses, aquaponics, drip irrigation, and adding fertilizers from many sources to the soil will, in computing the country's gross domestic product, surely grow the relative size of agriculture, my Government believes.

22. The Minister of State within the Ministry of Agriculture and the Blue Economy, the Honourable Randy Baltimore, will ensure that the many ambitions and objectives which my Government has set for this Ministry will surely be achieved with the energy, enthusiasm, intelligence and strength which this representative from St. Phillip's North brings to the table. Congratulations!

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Social and Urban Transformation

23. My Government's focus upon youth has been matched by its focus upon the elderly and those in need, including persons with disabilities. The Ministry of Social Transformation has ensured that no-one goes hungry with its zero-hunger

program. In addition to supporting a food kitchen, the Ministry provides food vouchers which enable dignified purchases from a number of supermarkets; the vouchers are intended for those who have no income, or those whose incomes are so low that supplemental income is required.

24. For these past seventeen months, Minister Rawdon Turner has been successfully leading this Social Transformation program, and my Government is well pleased with the outcome. Thank you, Minister.

25. As my Government sets out to make our country an economic powerhouse, the aesthetics of our capital city cry out for attention. Minister of Urban Transformation, an architect by profession, has been tasked with removing derelict buildings from St. John's and to turn those blighted spaces into places of interest or new ownership, in a very short time. My Government encourages all property owners within commercial St. John's to renovate and to paint their properties. The refurbishment and renewal of the St. John's Police Station reflect the start of the renovation of Government-owned properties in the City. The refurbished Government House, resplendent in its beauty, is also an example of renewal of excellence. The National Archives is next on the refurbishment list. My Government assures all of its employees that the removal of mold and other sickening vectors, from spaces where employees spend their workdays, will be made safe for all.

26. The Minister of State within the Ministry of Social and Urban Transformation, the Honourable Kiz Johnson, will share the responsibility to ensure that these assignments are fully implemented. Knowing her track record, and the faith placed in her by the people of St. Phillip's South, my Government is assured that the elected representative will be a great success within the Ministry. Congrats, Madame!

My Government also thanks Sir Molwyn Joseph for his ministerial contributions over the years inclusive of health, wellness, the environment and civil service affairs. The health and well-being of the people of Antigua and Barbuda continue to remain a priority for my Government, for we believe that a healthy nation is a wealthy nation. My Government also welcomes the Honourable Michael Joseph to this portfolio and expresses confidence that the same energy, commitment and

dedication that he has put into becoming a Parliamentary Representative will be put into his present portfolio. My Government is confident that the Minister working with the country's professionals, will keep our country safe amid the spread of various diseases causing concern around the world. We wish him every success.

Sports and the Creative Industries

27. While measurement of the nation's economic performance takes center-place annually, the several features of sporting events are reported in a manner that does not lend for providing an overall assessment of Antigua and Barbuda's potential as a sporting nation. My Government is determined to provide those youth with potential to win, in both regional and international sporting events, the infrastructure required to make the athletes vault over the competitors from larger States. Our cricketers have been very successful in making names for themselves, over the past fifty years. My Government is determined to ensure that in track and field events, whether at CARIFTA or the Americas, moving Antigua and Barbuda to Olympic medalists is our nation's objective. That is the ambition of a "lifestyle superpower".

28. Throughout communities across our 170 square miles of *terra firma*, it is my Government's intention to ensure that every facet of sporting yields excellence. The renaissance in sports is to be measured against our history of performance. Those who swim and pursue water sports are not to be disadvantaged. An Olympic-size swimming pool is shortly to be completed at the grounds adjacent to the ABICE, giving swimmers the opportunity to achieve excellence. Though baseball is seen as a sport which the Spanish-speaking population enjoys, every effort is to be made to ensure that the teams from Antigua and Barbuda can successfully compete regionally, within the Americas and globally. The Honourable Dwayne George, himself an outstanding athlete who has successfully competed in many fora, will lead an invigorated Ministry of Sports and Creative Industries. His known appetite for success, whether on stage or in electoral politics, is sure to lead him into making Antigua and Barbuda shine globally in sports.

29. Although our Carnival is the largest national display of creativity and artistry, Carnival 2026 is shaping up to become the most outstanding since the start of the annual event, in 1957. The Caribbean's greatest Summer Festival is already gaining momentum and drive, and the artistes are already at work producing outstandingly for the enjoyment of spectators and music lovers. My Government will inject several million dollars into the festival in order to ensure its success. The airlines have already agreed to extra flights, the hotels and other places of accommodation are already planning for a bumper season.

30. The celebratory Carnival events are to be matched with a solemn ceremony, my Government agrees, marking 192 years since 1834, when forced labour was brought to an end throughout the British Empire. The Reparations Committee, led by a very competent advocate, will ensure that the significance of 1st August 1834 is not lost in the merrymaking. Our nation's 45 years of Independence, coming on 1st November 2026, will also provide the leadership of the Ministry to engage meaningfully with all those elements of thanksgiving that mark our people's climb out of degradation and exploitation.

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A Legislative Agenda for 2026 to 2031

31. My Government has prepared a legislative agenda which takes into account the shortened term which triggered a new parliamentary session after April 30. The Attorney General, Sir Steadroy Benjamin –the most sound of legal practitioners within this jurisdiction— has advocated a comprehensive slate of new and amended legislation that will vault Antigua and Barbuda above its O.E.C.S. and other counterparts. Reforms to the Police Services, the Fire and Rescue Services, forensic services and electronic crimes of every variety will be addressed in the several proposed new legislation. Given the reporting by several workers of harassment by superiors, laws that protect the vulnerable and ensure fairness in establishing truth, will be brought before the Parliament by my Government within a short time.

32. Other laws that impact food safety, mental health, pharmacy regulation, and the operation of medical laboratories and nursing homes, will come before this Parliament in the interest of ensuring better treatment of the sick, and improved safety standards for all. In strengthening border security, proposed legislation will be brought forward that will improve on the advance passenger information system, for example. My Government wishes to ensure that the State adheres to all international standards as they evolve.

33. The Citizenship by Investment Program—that has garnered more than EC\$2,000,000,000 (two billion dollars) since 2013 when it was made law—has become a significant contributor to non-tax revenue, and now accounts for more than 10% of the country’s gross domestic product. Every decision by the Parliament, including legislative changes, will be undertaken to safeguard its importance to Antigua and Barbuda and the other O.E.C.S. members that are engaged in attracting investments through this method. While responsibility for this important economic sector falls within the Prime Minister’s portfolio, the amendments to the legislation will be a collaborative effort. My Government hails the Director of the C.I.P. program for the superb leadership and unassailable integrity which she brings to managing this very important revenue sector.

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Conclusion

34. My Government has long believed and has adhered to a fundamental principle that is captured in a pithy, two-word adage: “**leadership matters**”. The success of governance during these past 12 years, or since 2014 to present, has been the result of superb leadership by a Prime Minister whose responsibilities include the Ministry of Finance.

35. One of the most challenging moments faced by the new Finance Minister was to extricate the State from the grip of the International Monetary Fund (the IMF). In the week following the June 2014 general elections, the representative of the

IMF presented himself to the Government requesting payment on a loan which had fallen into default. The request for a moratorium was denied; instead, a second IMF Program was offered. The wisdom of a former banker allowed the new Minister of Finance to reject the offer and, instead, to arrange to pay the loan off in full. In four years, or by 2018, my Government repaid EC\$320 million dollars in full to the IMF. It was a most satisfying moment in the short history of a new administration, my Government declares, demonstrating what happens when leadership is of a high caliber. That decision has marked the ambition of my Government to create an economic powerhouse and to build a lifestyle superpower for its citizens and residents.

36. In 2007, a previous administration passed into law a *Barbuda Land Act* that seemingly declared property in Barbuda to be owned in common by all residents of the sister-isle. My Government determined that those citizens resident on Barbuda ought to have the same ability to own land in fee simple, as do those citizens resident on Antigua. My Government changed the law to allow—for the first time in the near-400-year modern history of the State—ownership to be claimed, by all those previously disenfranchised, for one dollar. My Government asserts that superior leadership mattered then as now. Despite the many court cases and objections, the apex court of this land has ruled that all lands that are not privately owned in Barbuda is the Crown's. Every effort to place roadblocks in the path of development and progress in Barbuda, has failed. Today, more than EC\$3 billion dollars have been invested in Barbuda, making the sister-isle one of the most attractive places in the Caribbean for foreign direct investments. Barbuda has been transformed by bold leadership, and a renaissance.

37. My Government, in collaboration with the American University of Antigua (AUA), turned Antigua and Barbuda into the Conferences and Meetings Venue of the Eastern Caribbean. The United Nations 4th Conference on Small Island Developing States was held in Antigua one year ago, last May 2025. More than 5,000 delegates descended upon Antigua, were thoroughly enamored of the destination and venue, and left Antigua satisfied with the outcome of the 4th SIDS United Nations Conference. The OAS held its Fifty Fifth General Assembly at the AUA Conference Venue, as have the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Authority for a

second consecutive year. In November 2026, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (the CHOGM) will convene in Antigua and Barbuda, with more than 7,000 delegates and scores of Heads of Government and of State. The CHOGM promises to be the largest and most challenging of international conferences. My Government expresses its thanks to the British High Commission and its Government for the invaluable assistance which has been provided to ensure the safety and security of the many Heads who will participate. My Government records its profound gratitude to the members of the Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda, the Antigua and Barbuda Defence Force, the Antigua and Barbuda Fire and Rescue Services, the Office of National Drug and Money Laundering Control Policy, immigration and customs officers, and all other security personnel who work daily to safeguard our nation, protect our borders, maintain public order, and keep our people safe. Their professionalism, discipline, courage and sacrifice continue to provide an essential foundation for national stability and development. As Antigua and Barbuda prepares to host the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting later this year, my Government is confident that these dedicated men and women will once again demonstrate the highest standards of service and professionalism to the region and the world.

38. My Government has adopted the proposal put forward by the oldest yet most energized trade union to provide a “livable wage” rather than a “minimum wage”, to workers whose earnings are customarily among the lowest. The “livable wage” concept differs from the other; the pursuit of a measurable wage that allows for workers to own their homes and to support their families adequately, is the lifestyle superpower which my Government aims to achieve.

39. Antigua and Barbuda is off to a great start, a mere 45 years following independence, my Government asserts. Despite wars and rumors of wars, despite hurricanes and earthquakes, despite droughts and floods, despite external shocks and the vulnerability of smallness, the nation is facing a renaissance that will make her unrecognizable a few years hence. The time is perfect for our leaders in the Parliament to demonstrate to the electorate who sent them to this honourable house, that the achievement of a renaissance is well within the grasp of this nation.

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