



**THE GOVERNOR GENERAL
HER EXCELLENCY
DAME LOUISE LAKE-TACK GCMG, DGN, DSt.J**

**SPEECH FROM THE
THRONE
Fifth Session of Parliament**

“Staying the Course: Focused and Committed”

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2012



STAYING THE COURSE:

Focused and Committed

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE 2013
Fifth Session of Parliament
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Staying the Course: Focused and Committed

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**Her Excellency Dame Louise Lake-Tack GCMG, DGN, DSt.J
Governor General of Antigua and Barbuda**

Madam President and Members of the Senate;

Madam Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

It is once again my distinct pleasure to present the Speech from the Throne to the combined Houses of our Parliament and to the nation.

Today, at opening of the Fifth Session of Parliament of my Government's Second Term in office, our first acknowledgement must be to God who has guided us thus far through the year and through a turbulent Hurricane Season.

While we thank God for sparing us from the ravages of hurricanes during the past season, our faith calls us to commiserate with our friends and family in Jamaica, the Bahamas, Haiti, the Republic of Cuba and in the New York Tri-State area in the United States, who are still recovering from the devastation of Hurricane Sandy.

We are confident that the resilience, fortitude and unwavering commitment of the people of the Caribbean and the East coast of the United States to surmount all odds will assist in the recovery. Our prayers are with the people and administrations of Jamaica, the Bahamas, Haiti, the Republic of Cuba and the United States of America.

While our friends grapple with the effects of Climate Change, many Small Developing States like Antigua and Barbuda continue to devise ways to deal with a world economy that is showing sluggish signs of recovery from the worst economic disaster in recent times.

Our world is also being challenged in countless ways: peace and security are fragile in many countries, democracy is being challenged and disasters induced by Climate Change are becoming more rampant.

This changing world calls for us all to work together in the interest of our nation and its people. The relationship between citizens and residents must be one that unifies in the hope of combating our many challenges. We must therefore remain focused and stay the course set forward by my government.

As elected members of the House of Representatives and appointed members of the Senate, together you have been entrusted with a solemn responsibility to serve the interest of the citizens and residents of Antigua and Barbuda.

The words of our national anthem ring true to us today. It is imperative that we all **gird our loins and join the battle.**

As my Government steers the ship of state through the turbulent waters created by a global recession, all hands are required on deck; there is no room for spectators. We are called to be true patriots in our democracy.

American business entrepreneur John Renesch boldly stated:

***“Democracy is a team sport; it is not like going to a ballgame where you sit passively and decide if you like the players and evaluate their abilities after watching the game. We are the players, we are the team, in a democratic nation or a democratic world.*”**

Our collective task today is to build a sense of community in our nation. My Government stands ready to welcome the true patriots of our nation onboard - to continue the task of building a strong and productive nation.

My Government, three years ago, commenced the process of reshaping our nation – setting it on a firm foundation. A fiscal consolidation programme that focused on aligning our revenues and expenditures was designed. As this consolidation process unfolded, my Government secured financial and technical assistance from international, regional and bilateral sources to support our fiscal reform efforts.

Though it has not been easy, the fiscal consolidation and debt restructuring initiatives have borne fruit. The country's debt service obligations have decreased significantly and we are firmly on the path to fiscal sustainability. We must stay the course – We must remain focused – we must remain committed.

A significant aspect of our staying the course is ensuring that public sector and social sector transformation remain integral to our goal of growth and sustainable development.

With assistance from the World Bank, my Government expects to focus on several initiatives in this regard in the coming year, with the aim of improving public sector management, enhancing social protection programmes, and upgrading the skills of unemployed and underemployed persons.

My Government will be in a better position to effectively target these initiatives and to plan our overall development with information from the Housing and Population Census, whose final report will be presented to the public in a matter of weeks.

This parliament has the task of continuing the economic and social transformation that my Government started. You must stay the course – you must remain focused and committed.

Madam President and Members of the Senate;

Madam Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

For the first time since we embarked three years ago on a quest to place our beloved country on a path of growth and sustainable development, we are seeing definite signs of economic recovery.

This has happened because of my government's unwavering commitment to the fiscal consolidation and debt management measures outlined in the National Economic and Social Transformation Plan. If we remain focused and committed, Antigua and Barbuda can expect stability in its fiscal and debt operations and further increase in output in 2013 and the years to come.

In 2013 my government is determined to stay the course, with continued financial and technical assistance from our development partners – the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank, the Caribbean Development Bank, the European Union, the Caribbean Regional Technical Assistance Centre, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

My government shares the national concern regarding job creation, even as we realise that it is not unique to us. Our main trading partners and tourism source markets face a similar situation, in the face of the slow pace of world economic recovery.

With tourism as our main export, what happens in these countries has a direct impact on our fortunes, for out of work persons cannot afford to travel to exotic destinations on vacation.

However, in 2013 we will increase our focus on the Economic Action Plan, which aims to stimulate the kind of investment necessary to create jobs and grow the economy.

Even as we seek to encourage foreign direct investment, we will continue to pursue internally-driven initiatives such as the Construct Antigua Barbuda Initiative. The Small Business Credit Guarantee Scheme, which is being administered by the Antigua Barbuda Development Bank, has got off the ground and will provide our small businesses much needed access to financing.

My government anticipates that our participation in the Caribbean Growth Forum will help us to identify the policies and strategies we can implement to promote growth, improve competitiveness, and create jobs.

Antigua and Barbuda is indebted to the World Bank, the Caribbean Development Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the United Kingdom Department for International Development and the Canadian International Development Agency for their support for this programme.

Madam President and Members of the Senate;

Madam Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

Historically, Antigua and Barbuda has established a tradition of adopting creative but well regulated international business services in pursuit of growth and development. Regarded as a high income and human development nation, official development assistance (ODA) has significantly contracted.

However, building on bilateral relations with developed and emerging states, Antigua and Barbuda has made strides in securing concessionary financing for several projects. My Government is committed to charting a course for greater self-determination which places Antigua and Barbuda firmly at the centre of directing the pace, impact and outcomes of development initiatives.

It is with the vision for mobilizing international capital while leveraging our competitive advantage that my government has designed the Citizenship by Investment Programme.

My Government's adoption of a Citizenship by Investment Programme is based on our confidence that it will:

- Promote economic growth, bolster job creation and fuel entrepreneurship;
- Attract developments which create ongoing and sustained tax revenues and other forms of income;

- Ensure social development in areas of health care, education, sports, youth development, culture, environment management and care for senior citizens;
- Generate significant capital injection annually into the national economy;
- Support the development of infrastructure, and
- Ensure that nationals continue to have access to affordable lands.

The Citizenship by Investment Programme will become law by the first quarter of 2013.

Madam President and Members of the Senate;

Madam Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

In 2013 the Ministry of Tourism, Civil Aviation and Culture will continue to expand and develop the five fundamental growth pillars for the tourism sector – strong enabling environment, human resource development, product development, marketing, promotion and brand awareness, and targeted airlift.

These five pillars will see the consolidation of critical strategic policy programmes and the development of new strategic policy initiatives.

My Government will fundamentally revamp its marketing and promotion strategy. The new marketing strategy will promote and develop the image of the destination in the world. In 2013 the Ministry's Integrated Online Marketing Strategy will become fully operational.

Without airlift the tourism sector cannot be sustained. In 2013, the Ministry of Tourism and Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority will continue to treat this sub-sector as a priority. This strategy will focus on adding seat capacity to our destination. Similarly, the 2012/13 season will see the destination receiving increased summer cruise calls.

Madam President and Members of the Senate;

Madam Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

My Government recognizes that if it is to remain on course to sustainable growth and development, education must be a top priority.

Universal Secondary Education will propel the transformation of the education sector in 2013. In order to accommodate this bold initiative, two secondary schools are to be built – one in Five Islands and another in Tomlinson's.

Training of new teachers will also remain a priority of my Government to ensure our students receive the best tutelage.

My government is also making great strides in the increasingly high number of scholarships, which have been funded for hundreds of young people. Over 213 scholarships have been approved by the Board of Education for 2012 at a cost of 1.9 million dollars, and over 100 under the Prime Minister's Scholarship programme at a cost of 1.8 million dollars.

Early in the New Year efforts will be made to enact the Antigua State College Act which will establish a Board as a body corporate to manage the affairs of the College.

In 2013, my Government will move to achieve a number of goals in education with particular emphasis on increasing the number of experienced Mathematics teachers assigned to schools; twinning with the University of the Virgin Islands in order to train promising, young Mathematics students; and training at least five teachers at the Masters level in Mathematics.

Parallel with my Government's enacting the Antigua State College Act is the University of Antigua and Barbuda Act which will establish the nation's premier institution of higher education.

With support from the Board of Education, construction on the new public library will recommence early in the New Year.

My government will implement the Sports Strategic Plan which will see registered community groups and clubs managing sports and recreational facilities. My Government will strengthen community based and national sports programmes and, with the assistance of the Government of the Republic of Cuba, establish a National Institute of Sports.

The Government will also make final plans for the development of a National Cultural Policy that will position Antigua and Barbuda as a cultural hub of the Caribbean. Also, the National Festival, Carnival, will undergo a review with the aim of making it cost effective and marketable by further developing strong relations with the private sector.

Madam President and Members of the Senate;

Madam Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

My Government has indicated that Public Sector Transformation is a priority during this Parliamentary Year. The Legislative Agenda includes five pieces of legislation which will make doing business easier.

The Electronic Filing Act will make provision so that information required by law can be submitted using electronic forms in the manner specified by the public authorities.

This new legislation will provide flexibility for public authorities to design electronic forms suited for online transactions, and hence improve the customer's overall e-Government experience.

The Electronic Crimes Act will make provision for the prevention and punishment of electronic crimes.

Some of the offences to be created under this Act will relate to: sending offensive messages through communication service, identity theft, electronic forgery, violation of privacy, child pornography, electronic terrorism, crank calls to law enforcement, and electronic stalking,.

The Electronic Evidence Act makes provision for the legal recognition of electronic records and establishes rules for the admissibility of electronic records that are subject to the hearsay rule.

The Electronic Funds Transfer Act is designed to regulate the transfer of money through electronic means This Act is intended to build user confidence in electronic commerce and electronic transfers.

The Electronic Transactions Act will provide for the transfer of information and records by electronic means.

The proposed legal framework established by this Act will enable the conclusion of contracts and creation of certain rights and obligations through the electronic medium.

My Government's Legislative Agenda will also include a Real Estate Agents Registration Act which will require these agents in the state to register and adhere to a Code of Conduct to give adequate protection to purchasers and vendors.

The Betting and Gaming Act will replace the current legislation passed in 1963, and provide strict regulations and standards for the local operations of lottery, betting and gaming establishments.

The Status of Children Act, the Domestic Violence Act, and the Adoption Act will be reviewed in the New Year, with a view to amending them in accordance with the standards established by UN Conventions.

Madam President and Members of the Senate;

Madam Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

My Government's Foreign Policy is primarily geared towards advancing and safeguarding the interests of Antigua and Barbuda. It is a vital tool for my government to stay the course and maintain sustainable growth.

The dynamic challenges and factors that are inherent in the nation's economic and social framework are the same forces that will drive and influence diplomatic relations and engagements.

It is for this reason that my Government's embassies and consular offices will seek to obtain economic opportunities, understand and analyze the changes that are taking place globally and to identify critical areas of support and cooperation for Antigua and Barbuda.

In 2013 my Government will focus on building closer links with key strategic partners and the citizens of Antigua and Barbuda living abroad, designed to attract tangible support for national projects, technical development and training for education.

On January 1, Antigua and Barbuda will celebrate thirty years of diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China.

Over the past thirty years, our two nations have worked harmoniously on a number of development projects, including sports, science and technology, culture, education, healthcare and infrastructural development which have lessened the impact of a global economy in recession.

Antigua and Barbuda attaches great importance to the continued development of relations with the government of the People's Republic of China and believes that our continued cooperation would enrich the mutually beneficial relations and strengthen the ties between our governments and peoples.

My Government congratulates the People's Republic of China on this auspicious occasion and looks forward to continued cooperation based on mutual respect, equality and mutual benefit.

My Government also looks forward to our continued excellent cooperation with the Republic of Cuba, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the United States of America, the United Kingdom, the European Union, the Republic of Korea, Brazil, Japan, Australia, the Republic of Georgia and the Republic of Kazakhstan.

My Government will also continue to facilitate Antigua and Barbuda's involvement in the OECS, CARICOM, ALBA and CELAC as part of the country's commitment to regional integration and South-South Cooperation.

Our membership in institutions like the United Nations, the OAS and the Commonwealth will continue to serve as important platforms for alliance building and cooperation.

In this regard, Ambassador Dr. John Ashe, Antigua and Barbuda's Permanent Representative to the United Nations will assume the presidency of the United Nations 68th General Assembly for the 2013 session.

This is a major achievement for Antigua and Barbuda. It came about as a result of many years of hard work, good and effective diplomatic characteristics and the efforts of my Government to build alliances with many countries around the world.

As a result Antigua and Barbuda will be propelled to the forefront of international cooperation and diplomacy. Antigua and Barbuda will be identified as a small island state with big responsibility to manage and preside over the affairs of the United Nations General Assembly during the year of the 68th session.

Additionally, Ambassador Conrad Hunte, Deputy Permanent Representative at the United Nations will be appointed as a member of the UN Advisory Committee on Budget and Administrative Questions for the period 2013 to 2016, while, Her Excellency Dame Deborah Lovell, Antigua and Barbuda's Ambassador to the United States and Permanent Representative to the Organization of American States, will continue to Chair the 'Leo Rowe Fund and the Inter-American Council for Integral Development (CIDI).

In light of these achievements, My Government will continue to build capacity at Headquarters while seeking to obtain value for money in the operation of our missions.

Last year, my Government announced its intention to enter into enhanced bilateral cooperation partnership arrangements with our French neighbors and others under the rubric of CARIFORUM.

To that end, Memorandums of Understanding were signed with Guadeloupe, Martinique and Haiti.

Early in 2013, the President of the Regional Council of Guadeloupe will lead a delegation to hold wide ranging discussions with my government, the Cabinet and other members of the public and private sectors.

My Government in 2013 will also continue preliminary discussions with the EU on the framework for EU development assistance under the upcoming 11th European Development Funds cycle.

Madam President and Members of the Senate;

Madam Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

My Government, during this Parliamentary Year, intends to simplify the process by which Antiguan and Barbudans can attain land ownership.

This process, a part of the Public Sector Transformation Programme, will see the Lands Division establishing and implementing a fully functional Management Information System. This will assist the division in attaining a 25% increase in land development for both residential and commercial purposes by the end of 2013.

In the New Year, my Government intends to:

1. Establish five subdivisions for development: Piccadilly, Weir's Estate, Bendals, All Saints', and Powell's; and
2. Develop a subdivision for commercial use within the first six months of 2013 in Paynter's, Belmont and Old Parham Road.

Throughout 2013, my Government will continue its effort to increase the production of cotton for the Japanese market. Further expansion will also be made to the production of pineapple at Cades Bay Pineapple Station and efforts will be made to supply planting material to farmers in order to increase the production of the Antigua Black Pineapples.

Focus will also be on promoting the sustainable development and responsible management of fisheries and aquaculture activities in Antigua and Barbuda's waters.

Madam President and Members of the Senate;

Madam Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

In the new Parliamentary Year, my government will ensure that the subject of health remains a key priority area.

My Government will focus on refurbishing of one of the male wards at the Clarendon Psychiatric Hospital with the assistance of DIGICEL at an estimated cost of fifty thousand US dollars. In an effort to manage the facility according to modern legislative articles, a new Mental Health Act will be brought before parliament during the first quarter of the year.

In addition, the Fiennes Institute in collaboration with the Mill reef fund will undertake a walk-ways improvement project during 2013. The project includes the repaving of all walkways and activity areas.

The Government of Antigua and Barbuda recognizes that the challenged and older citizens of our country are a valuable resource. Healthy independent older persons contribute to the welfare of their household, community and our country's development.

To this end, during the fiscal year 2012, a National Policy on Ageing for Antigua and Barbuda was developed. The United Nations principles for Older Persons; Independence, participation, care, self-fulfillment and dignity serve as the guiding principles against which the policies on ageing and health will be measured.

Also of vital importance to my government's health programme for 2013 are the functions provided by our nation's nurses.

In this regard, my Government will review and update the Nurses Registration Act which regulates nursing practice in Antigua and Barbuda, CARICOM and the wider field to make it congruent with new trends in nursing.

Nursing Leadership Training will be conducted at an international level in conjunction with the International Council of Nurses and the Pan American Health Organisation.

To augment the care of patients and to appropriately focus on Non-Communicable Diseases, my Government will run specialty diabetic, hypertensive and renal clinics concurrently with the existing diabetic and hypertensive clinics conducted at the main health centers on a weekly basis.

Madam President and Members of the Senate;

Madam Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

My Government, since coming to office in 2004, has demonstrated that it believes in gender equality and women's empowerment.

During this Parliamentary Year a National Strategic Action Plan to End Gender-based Violence and create a community responsiveness in addressing violence against women particularly in the area of sexual violence will be implemented.

My Government also fully recognizes that it has a responsibility to ensure that those who have worked tirelessly to build this nation live comfortable lives.

The Social Security Scheme was established to provide a source of income for contributors once they have reached a pensionable age, during periods of illness, maternity, invalidity or death in the form of funeral grants.

The Government is committed to ensuring the viability and sustainability of Social Security, and in this regard, my government is giving serious consideration to the recommendations of the Board of Directors regarding changes to the Social Security Act and Regulations.

My Government will continue to make regular contributions to the Scheme and will continue the trend of not borrowing from the Scheme as a matter of policy.

Madam President and Members of the Senate;

Madam Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

Although our security forces have recorded numerous successes over the past year in the fight against crime and violence, my government will spare no effort in ensuring that the law protects each citizen, resident and visitor.

Throughout the new Parliamentary Year, work will continue assiduously to improve the overall security of the twin island state of Antigua and Barbuda. As such several Departments within the Ministry have acquired new equipment and skills towards that endeavour.

In 2012 the Antigua and Barbuda Defence Force successfully recruited and trained 24 new soldiers. The Antigua and Barbuda Defence Force Coast Guard recently received two Secure Seas Interceptors or Go-Fast Vessels that will directly impact the number of patrols carried out by the Coast Guard of our territorial waters.

These vessels, donated by the United States through the Caribbean Security Basin Initiative, will enhance the search and rescue operations of the Coast Guard as well as their primary use in the anti-trafficking and anti-smuggling fight.

In 2013 the ABDF will continue expand the Cadet Corps into the Nation's secondary schools.

The Immigration Department too has its role to play in Border Security, and in 2012 the Department acquired several pieces of equipment that have been used in the effort to secure the nation's borders. The Department is now possession of a **foster and freeman eye DC1**, a compact portable device for checking security and travel documents at the border.

A new finger-printing machine within the Immigration Department is poised to link persons within the OECS. The technology also enables persons on the sister isle of Barbuda to obtain police records in Barbuda.

The Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda continues to work closely with other law enforcement agencies to improve our nation's security through the Joint Inter-Agency Information Sharing Committee.

It is my Government's intention to embark on a phased project to place CCTV cameras at strategic locations across the state. This will assist in the law enforcement functions of the police and aid in the security of our nation.

The ONDCP will also continue to lend support to the security forces in money laundering and drugs interdiction. The ONDCP will continue to build on a very successful 2012 in its efforts to rid our streets of illegal substances.

Also in 2013 the Police Force will continue to upgrade the police stations that have been identified as needing extensive repairs. The Kennel for the K9 Unit will also be completed in 2013.

Her Majesty's Prison continues to operate despite the many obstacles, such as the overcrowding that continues to plague the institution. Ultimately, my Government aspires to have a new prison plant built, but have reviewed alternative arrangements to alleviate the problem.

The IMPACTS rehabilitation programme which commenced in 2012, will continue into the New Year as efforts continue to improve the overall condition of the prison.

As part of efforts to improve on the Prevention of Crime and Violence Action Plan, the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act will be brought to parliament early in the New Year.

The Act will provide for certain criminal convictions to be expunged after a defined rehabilitation period from the date of the conviction. This means that ex-offenders will not be required to disclose such convictions when applying for employment, or taking out insurance policies, nor will they be taken into account in respect of subsequent criminal proceedings. However, if additional convictions are obtained before the rehabilitation period has elapsed, these will extend that period.

Madam President and Members of the Senate;

Madam Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

Throughout 2012 my government played a major role in overseeing various international negotiating processes on sustainable development - the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

My Government will continue to follow the developments on a key outcome of these conferences calling for the development of Sustainable Development Goals.

With the UN's Millennium Development Goals set to reach their target year of 2015, these new Sustainable Development Goals, which are intended to be a significant driver to the UN's development agenda in the post-2015 era, have assumed great importance.

In this regard, my government will continue to be actively involved in the crucial developmental phase of these goals so as to ensure that our twin-island nation receives the maximum benefits to be derived during their implementation at all levels.

The recently completed round of negotiations at the Conference of the Parties 18 of the climate change convention and its Kyoto Protocol did not adequately address the issue of considerable importance to all small island States such as Antigua and Barbuda, namely, loss and damage due to the adverse effects of climate change.

This initiative is of critical importance to island States such as ours, in view of the well-known correlation between increased frequency of hurricanes and the adverse effects of climate change which can result in millions of dollars in damages to property.

This is why Antigua and Barbuda and other small island developing States are calling for an international insurance mechanism to compensate vulnerable States in the aftermath of climate change related event.

Madam President and Members of the Senate;

Madam Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

In 2012, Antigua and Barbuda maintained its position as the ICT Capital of the Caribbean. After seven years of sustained growth and investments in the ICT sector, Antigua and Barbuda is now regarded as the ICT Mecca of the Caribbean.

The recent launch of 4G LTE broadband Internet has positioned the Nation as a cutting edge technology hot spot. The deployment of this super fast Internet represents a bold step forward by my Government in preparing Antiguan and Barbudans for the next twenty years.

This future casting is representative of the visionary thinking of my Government, as it continues to plan deeply for what citizens will require in the future. 4G LTE has already begun to provide world class communications to the tourism sector, and Antigua and Barbuda has become a super competitive yachting destination.

With the increase in international investment in the ICT sector, small and micro enterprises (SMEs) are leveraging on technology to become competitive. My Government has successfully developed an Internet portal for SMEs to promote their businesses.

In 2013, my Government will continue the modernization of the technology networks in the operations of all areas of Central Government, paying particular attention to mission critical operations.

In 2013, my Government will begin an ICT Cadet Programme, a recruitment initiative that targets individuals who have completed secondary school.

This novel programme will provide an opportunity for individuals interested in working in Information Technology related fields to acquire technical skills as well as gain valuable workplace experience. It is envisaged that the majority of cadets could proceed onto a path of self-entrepreneurship.

My Government has also begun leveraging the latest mobile technologies in innovative ways to improve learning, teaching and communication between students and teachers. My Government is totally committed to equipping our students with the tools to make them more competitive citizens.

In 2013, under the Government Assisted Technology Endeavour(GATE), my Government will utilize cutting edge technology to help teachers bring more collaboration into the classroom. Secondary school students, commencing with forms three to five, will be allocated a modern, 4G LTE enabled computer tablet and 4G LTE broadband Internet connectivity, that will transform student learning and increase student-teacher engagement.

In 2013, the operations of Government will also be positively impacted, as GATE will propel the e-Government agenda as Government modernizes the way it provides services to the citizenry.

Madam President and Members of the Senate;

Madam Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

My Government has put forward a comprehensive programme that demands of us to stay the course and remain focused and committed.

My government recognizes that there will be challenges as we continue on the journey to national economic recovery and social transformation. What is required now is the commitment of the entire nation to stay the course.

My Government's plans and programmes presented today cannot be achieved by chance. They must be anchored in a concrete and realistic economic plan. That is why on Monday December 17th, my Government will present a Budget that is focused on staying on course with our National Economic and Social Transformation Plan.

My Government stands ready to continue building this nation – a nation whereby the hopes and dreams of the citizens and residents are achievable.

Greater opportunities lie ahead for our nation. The programmes outlined in the Speech from the Throne further consolidate and enhance our position. It is now time for the actions of all of us to stay the course towards growth and sustainable development.

Our nation now demands of us to summon the fortitude, compassion and resourcefulness for which Antiguan and Barbudans have become known. Our nation demands of us to summon a patriotism as espoused by Adlai Stevenson when he wrote:

“Patriotism is not a short frenzied burst of emotion, but the long and steady dedication of a lifetime.”

I take this opportunity to extend early sentiments for a joyous and peaceful Christmas and a Happy New Year to the President and Members of the Senate; to Madam Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives, and to all in our nation.

I also pray God’s Blessings on you, the members of the Senate and the House of Representatives: That your actions will be guided by Him who gives us strength and courage to do what is right by the Almighty – for, and in the interest of our beloved country and people.

Madam President of the Senate, Honourable Senators, Madam Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives, I pray that God will bless your counsel and make you equal to the trust bestowed upon you. I thank you.