

# Celebrating ABLP's Victory & The 2026 Labour Queen Pageant



*Special Edition: Labour Day 2026*

# Local News



## The Prime Minister and Attorney General Swore Oath to Antigua and Barbuda and the Constitution



The Office of the Governor General wishes to advise the public of a corrective administrative measure taken regarding the recent swearing-in ceremony for the Prime Minister and the Attorney General.

It was observed that during the initial proceedings, an earlier version of the Oath of Allegiance—swearing allegiance to the Crown—was inadvertently administered. Under the *Oaths Act 2025*, which came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2026, the prescribed form of the Oath of Allegiance has been updated to reflect the nation's evolving constitutional identity.

The current and legally required Oath of Allegiance, as set forth in Schedule 1 of the Act, requires the following declaration:

*"I, [Name], [swear by Almighty God] [solemnly and sincerely, declare and affirm] that I will faithfully bear true allegiance to the State of Antigua and Barbuda, its Constitution and laws."*

Upon recognition of this oversight, His Excellency the Governor General acted immediately to ensure full compliance with the law. In accordance with his authority to tender oaths to the Prime Minister and the Attorney General as specified in Schedule 2, a

second swearing-in ceremony was conducted. Both officials have now successfully taken and subscribed to the correct Oath of Allegiance to the **State of Antigua and Barbuda, its Constitution, and its laws.**

The Governor General's Office remains committed to upholding the constitutional standards of our nation and regrets any confusion caused by this inadvertent error. The records of the state now reflect the valid and updated oaths as required by the **Oaths Act 2025.**

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## 15-1-1 - The Antigua and Barbuda Electorate Rejects UPP

The dust is settling on the 2026 general elections in which the Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party reversed its fortunes of over three years ago when it almost lost the 2023 general elections to an overwhelming victory last Thursday.

The ABLP won fifteen of the sixteen seats on Antigua with the sole seat in Barbuda going to the Barbuda's People's Movement. The opposition United Progressive Party could only muster a single seat – the All Saints East and St. Luke constituency which includes Old Road, a bastion of anti-ABLP sentiments for decades.

The ABLP victory was also significant for other reasons; one of which was the manner in which they party has been able to 'retire' two stalwarts – Sir Robin Yearwood and Sir Molwyn Joseph, yet being able to hold on to the seats that they held for multiple electoral cycles.

Another key development was for the first time, two females will serve in the House of Representatives as Maria Browne has been joined by Kiz Johnson who represents the people of St. Philip South.

Under the theme of; *Renaissance: A New Era of Development and Prosperity*, the ABLP excited the imagination of the electorate by convincing them that a new day is coming under its careful and experienced leadership.

In contrast, the UPP was never able to mount an effective national campaign nor could it shake the view that it was a party stymied by in-fighting and competing egos. The results showed



that the people had no belief in what they were selling.

The election was likely to have signaled the end of the 'political road' for a number of individuals; Harold Lovell, Alister Thomas and possibly Sherfield Bowen and George Wehner.

With a fresh mandate, a team with a mixture of youth and experience, PM Browne promises a more even-hand-

ed development of all constituencies, even including Barbuda and All Saints East and St. Luke.

PM Browne has led the ABLP to four consecutive electoral victories; a feat accomplished before only by the Father of the Nation, Sir Vere Cornwall Bird. He has earned the right to be addressed: The Right Hon. Gaston Browne.



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- 📅 Thursdays, 7:30pm - Karaoke
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- 🍳 Breakfast served from 7:30am
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## The Ministers' Swearing-in Ceremony - The People's Celebrations



The Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party is taking the swearing-in ceremony for the Cabinet Ministers to the people with the event moving out of Government House and set for the American University Antigua Conference Centre on Tuesday.

It is not the first time that the party is making the swearing-in a public affair, as the space available at Government House always necessitated limits on the number of persons who can attend. In 2014, when the ABLP returned to office after defeating the United Progressive Party, the celebration marking the assignment of ministerial portfolios was held at the Antigua Recreation Ground.

This time around, Prime Minister Gaston Browne is inviting all and sundry to attend the ceremony at AUA giving its capacity to

seat comfortably more than one thousand persons.

All eyes are on the assignment of portfolios as there are now several newcomers to the government, all of whom are capable individuals with the capacity to

serve in the Cabinet.

Tuesday's event is likely to attract many individuals including members of the diplomatic corps, the leaders of industry, civil society and the rank and file of the ABLP.



### GOVERNMENT HOUSE *Antigua and Barbuda*

His Excellency

**Sir. Rodney Williams** GCMG, KGN, KSt J,  
DSc, DMSc, PhD(h.c), MBBS, FCAMA  
*The Governor General of Antigua and Barbuda*




and

Her Excellency

**Sandra, Lady Williams** CSt.J, FMC, DCL,  
PhD(hons) MSc, MCIM, Dip.M, BA

*request the pleasure of your company  
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### SWEARING-IN CEREMONY OF MINISTERS OF GOVERNMENT

-  Tuesday 5 May 2026
-  at Five o'clock in the afternoon
-  AUA Conference Centre  
Jabberwock Drive

*Business Attire*

*R.S.V.P.*  
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30<sup>th</sup> April, 2026

**DECLARATION OF RESULTS**

In accordance with Section 30 (5) of the Representation of the People (Amendment) Act 2001, the following persons were duly elected for the seventeen (17) Constituencies in the General Elections held on 30<sup>th</sup> April, 2026:

St. John's City West	Gaston Browne	ABLP Candidate
St. John's City East	Melford Nicholas	ABLP Candidate
St. John's City South	Steadroy Benjamin	ABLP Candidate
St. John's Rural West	Michael Joseph	ABLP Candidate
St. John's Rural South	Daryll Matthew	ABLP Candidate
St. John's Rural East	Maria Browne	ABLP Candidate
St. John's Rural North	H. Charles Fernandez	ABLP Candidate
St. Mary's North	Philmore Benjamin	ABLP Candidate
St. Mary's South	Dwayne George	ABLP Candidate
All Saints East & St. Luke	Lars Jamale Pringle	UPP Candidate
All Saints West	Anthony Smith Jr.	ABLP Candidate
St. George	Michael Freeland	ABLP Candidate
St. Peter	Rawdon Turner	ABLP Candidate
St. Philip North	Randy Baltimore	ABLP Candidate
St. Philip South	Kiz Nathaniel Johnson	ABLP Candidate
St. Paul	E. P. Chet Greene	ABLP Candidate
Barbuda	Trevor Walker	BPM Candidate

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'H.E. Arthur G. B. Thomas'.

H.E. Arthur G. B. Thomas  
Chairman

## 2026 Labour Queen Pageant Delivers A Spectacular Show



The 2026 Antigua Trades and Labour Union/Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party Pageant delivered a spectacle of ‘epic proportions’ on Saturday night at the American University of Antigua Conference Room.

The pageant featured thirteen contestants, twice as many as would usually participate in the annual Queen of Carnival Pageant. A pageant with that many contestants would usually be very lengthy and would tend to lose the audience quite early in the show. Not so for the 2026 Labour Queen Pageant!

In the capable hands of **Bruce-la Marsh-Sutton** and her team at **Marsh and Marsh Productions**, the show flowed smoothly and effortlessly through the evening. With the contestants competing in four segments; Speech, Performing Talent, Evening Wear and Interview it was always going to present a challenge

for keeping the show under four hours, but having the show proceed without ‘gaps’ between the segment, the show concluded in less than five hours; a remarkable achievement.

The show’s hosts – Urcil Charles Jr. and Shannakisha Francis, a former contestant and former Miss Queen of Carnival, kept the show tight and entertaining with their light banter as they moved the show along.

The AUA conference centre was the perfect venue for the pageant as its audio-visual effects and additional lighting and audio all came together for a production that most certainly made the prime minister smile as it matched his expectations for ‘next level’ productions in everything that is done locally. The production was certainly, *next level!*

It was the second time that the show was held at the AUA centre and the

organisers learned from last year when many patrons were forced to stand at the back because there was not adequate seating. This year, seating was added and the configuration of the interior was laid out such that everyone had a clear view of the stage.

Whether you are a someone who enjoys pageants or not, Saturday night’s production would have gone a long way in changing your mind.

The show centered around the theme: *“Echoes of the Past’ – Rhythm – Soul – Spirit.* In their speeches, the contestants focused their topics on the early years of the AT&LU/ABLP. In particular, they paid tribute to the **Father of the Nation, Sir Vere Cornwall Bird** who was at the forefront of the struggles for equal rights, recognition and self-determination.

They also linked the struggles of the past to the achievements of today and the passing of the ‘baton’ from Sir Vere to Sir Lester Bird and his team in the 1980’s and 90’s, now placed in the capable hands of **Prime Minister Gaston Browne** and his team from 2014 to present.

As the ABLP celebrates its massive electoral victory less than a week ago, and its focus on the institutional underpinnings of the ABLP that contributed to that victory, the Labour Queen Pageant is one of the pillars linking the past with the present for this institution. It is now the breeding ground for young women wishing to enter the Queen of Carnival, which is seen as a national pageant.

The Labour Queen Pageant is a highly-valued institution within the AT&LU/ABLP that has to be preserved and maintained for many years to come.



# LABOUR DAY

## Rally & March



**MONDAY**  
**4TH**  
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**2026**

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Photos courtesy: Alex Rhodes

# Local News



## The Official Results of the 2026 AT&LU/ABLP Labour Queen Show

**2026 Labour Queen: Queenela Williams** representing St. Mary's South

**1st Runner-Up: Tonya Phillips** representing St. Johns Rural South

**2nd Runner-Up: Maydoria Smith** representing St. John's Rural West

**3rd Runner Up: Aaliyah Andrews** representing St. John's Rural East

### Sponsors

- Hon. Gaston Browne
- Hon . Chet Greene
- Hon. Charles Fernandez
- Hon. Maria Browne
- Hon. Daryll Matthew
- Hon. Anthony Smith
- Hon. Randy Baltimore
- Hon. Micheal Joseph
- Hon. Dwayne George
- Hon. Micheal Freeland
- Comrade Lamin Newton
- Ambassador Theon Ali
- Happy kids
- Comrade Philliph Shoul
- Xtreme gym
- Arton Capital
- Bridge service station
- Caribbean Gems
- District Land
- Alciana title at appetizing eats
- Dr Eldean Rudelle
- Little b and j
- Comrade Philliph Shoul
- Comrade Donna Chaia

### Special thanks to the following individuals and organisations;

- Members of the 2026 Labour Queen Organising Committee
- Marsh and Marsh Production
- AUA
- Alex photography
- Shireen Gilead
- Elite Dancers



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 Spa robe set  
 Heatless curlers set  
 1 Luggage set

**2nd Runner Up**  
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 Trophy  
 Folding walking pad  
 Weekend for two at Seaview Antigua  
 Gold earrings  
 Spa robe set  
 Heatless curlers set  
 1 Luggage set  
**3rd Runner Up**  
 \$8,000.00  
 Trophy

Folding walking pad  
 Gold pad  
 Weekend for two at Seaview Antigua  
 Gold earrings  
 Spa robe gift set  
 Heatless curlers set  
 Other Prizes  
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 Best in Evening Wear - Gift Certificate from The District  
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 Laptop compliments Honourable Maria Brown & \$1,000 compliments Alciana Tittle at Appetizing Eats  
 Best Speech -11-inch Apple I-Pad  
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**WE ARE GETTING STRONGER**

## Message of congratulations from President Irfaan Ali of Guyana

I extend warmest congratulations to the Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, Gaston Browne, on his re-election for a fourth term.

This decisive victory is a clear reflection of the strong support of the Antigua and Barbudan people, and the deep confidence they continue to place in his leadership and vision for the nation.

I look forward to working closely with Prime Minister Browne to advance our shared priorities, particularly in strengthening regional integration and cooperation. Together, we will continue to build a more resilient, prosperous and secure Caribbean Community for all our people.

I wish him and his administration every success as they embark on this new term.



## Message of congratulations from Prime Minister Hon. Andrew Holness of Jamaica



Congratulations to Prime Minister-elect Gaston Browne on retaining a fourth term in office and on becoming the longest-serving Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda.

I look forward to the continued strengthening of the partnership between our countries as we advance our shared regional priorities.

# Local News



**Kamla Persad-Bissessar** 

@PM\_Kamla

X.com

Congratulations to Gaston Browne on securing a decisive fourth term in office, leading the Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party (ABLP) to a commanding electoral victory.

This renewed mandate reflects the strong confidence of the people of Antigua and Barbuda in your leadership and the ABLP and stands as a clear affirmation of the strength of democracy.

Best wishes as you continue to serve and lead your nation forward.

[@gastonbrowne](#)



## Cuba's president congratulates PM Gaston Browne on re-election



**Cuba's President Miguel Díaz-Canel**

Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez has extended congratulations to Gaston Browne following his re-election as Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda.

In a formal letter dated 1 May from Havana, the Cuban president conveyed "warmest congratulations and best wishes for your success" on Mr Browne's return to office, also ac-

knowledging the electoral victory of his party.

Mr Díaz-Canel said the message was sent on behalf of the government and people of Cuba, and expressed confidence in the continued leadership of Mr Browne.

He also reaffirmed Cuba's commitment to strengthening ties between the two countries, highlighting coop-

eration, solidarity and longstanding friendship.

"Please accept my highest regards and esteem," the letter concluded.

The message reflects ongoing diplomatic relations between the two Caribbean nations, which have maintained close cooperation across areas such as health, education and regional development.



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## Delcy Rodríguez - Acting President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela:



On behalf of the people and Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, I congratulate Prime Minister Gaston Browne on this new electoral victory, as well as the people of Antigua and Barbuda for their democratic participation in this process.

This result reflects renewed confidence in his leadership and the continuity of his government's agenda. We in Venezuela celebrate this with genuine appreciation and reiterate our commitment to continue strengthening the bonds of brotherhood, cooperation, and solidarity that unite our Caribbean peoples, moving forward together on a shared agenda of development and common well-being.

## On behalf of the Government and people of Dominica

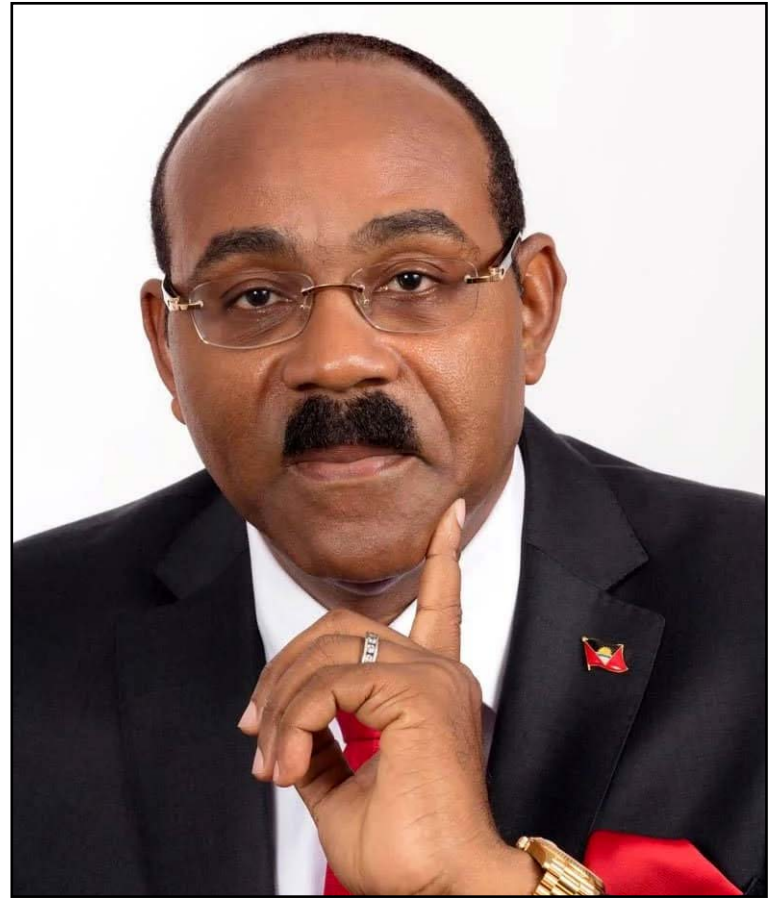
### Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Dominica Roosevelt Skerit

On behalf of the Government and people of Dominica, I extend warm congratulations to my friend and comrade, Prime Minister Gaston Browne, on his commanding victory in Thursday's general elections.

The result is a resounding vote of confidence from the people of Antigua and Barbuda in Prime Minister Browne and the Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party, returning them to office for a fourth consecutive term to continue building on national development gains.

We in Dominica look forward to strengthening our partnership with Prime Minister Browne and his Government in pursuit of shared regional priorities and the well-being of our people.

We wish him continued success as he leads Antigua and Barbuda forward.



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## Premier Wheatley Congratulates Prime Minister Gaston Browne on his Reelection

On behalf of the Government of The Virgin Islands, Premier Dr. Natalio Wheatley extends heartfelt congratulations to Antigua and Barbuda's Prime Minister, the Honourable Gaston Browne, on his reelection.

Honourable Browne's leadership of the Antigua Labour Party through four consecutive electoral victories is truly a monumental achievement. This election victory speaks not only to the enduring strength and vitality of the Party, but is a powerful testament to the profound trust and confidence the people of Antigua and Barbuda have placed in his stewardship and vision.

The Virgin Islands looks forward to deepening its relationship with Antigua and Barbuda in the years ahead.



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# BARBUDA Caribana 2026



## MAY 2026

### THURSDAY 21<sup>ST</sup>

- 2PM | OPENING PARADE
- 3PM | KIDS FEST
- 8PM | JUNIOR CALYPSO MONARCH

### FRIDAY 22<sup>ND</sup>

- 11AM | WHEELS UNITED - PARK & LIME
- 8:30PM | CALYPSO / SOCA MONARCH

### SATURDAY 23<sup>RD</sup>

- 10AM-5PM | SPRITZ & SUN - SEAFOOD FEST - AND-  
JOHNNY DESOUSA FISHING TOURNAMENT
- 10PM-4AM | CARIBANA COLORS FETE

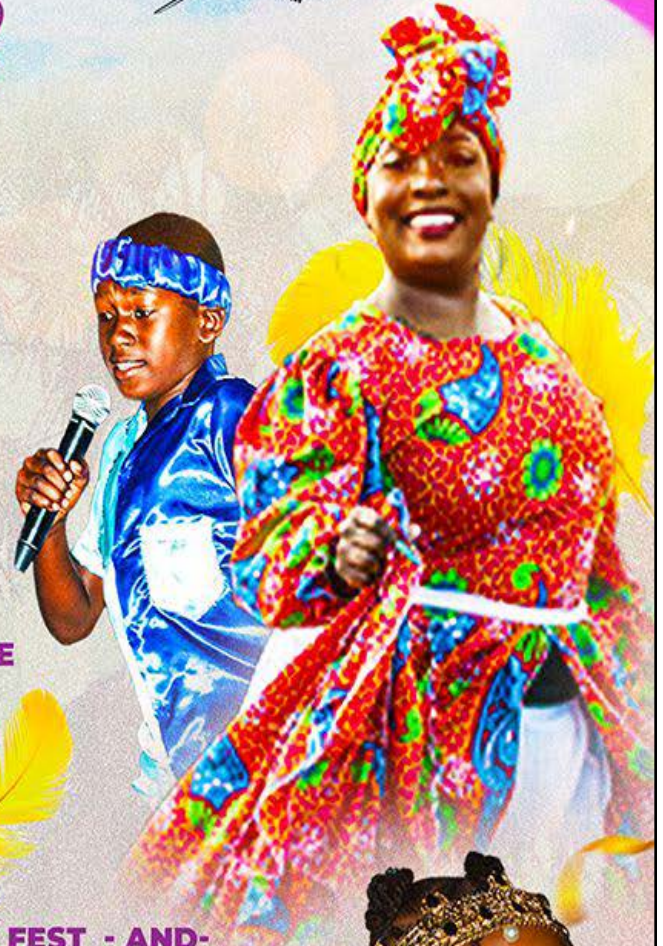
### SUNDAY 24<sup>TH</sup>

- 1PM | CARIBANA CLASSIC  
HORSE RACING

### MONDAY 25<sup>TH</sup>

- 4AM-10AM | J'OUVERT
- 6PM-10PM | LAST LAP

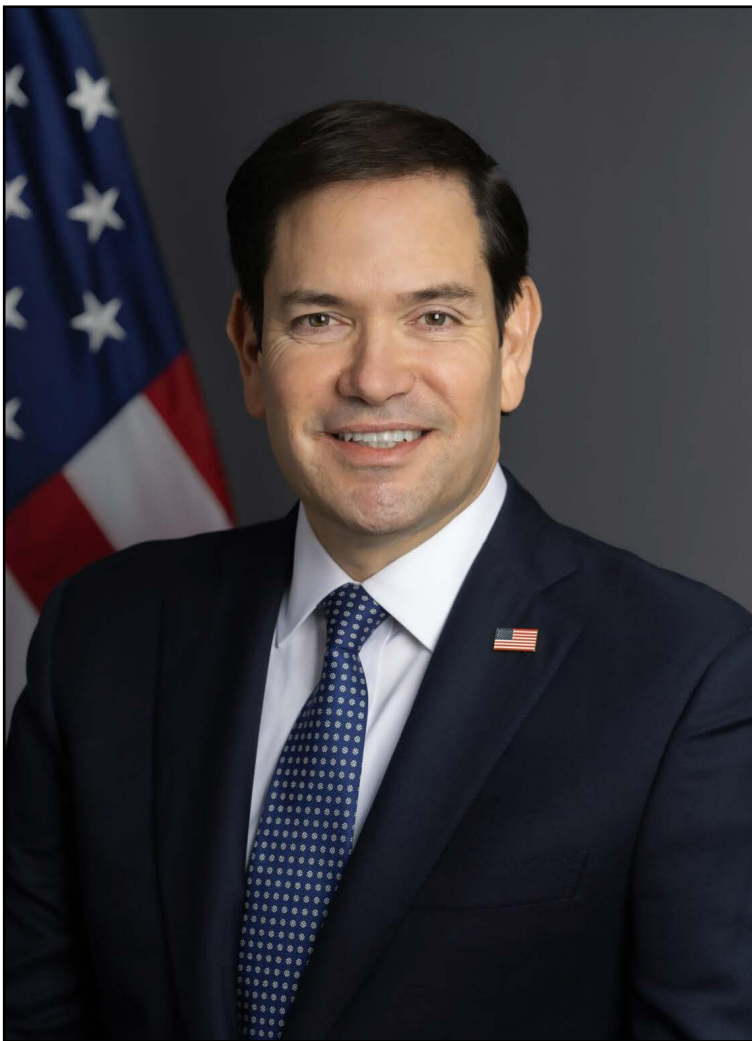
EVENT SCHEDULE



## **Congratulating Antigua and Barbuda's Prime Minister Gaston Browne on his Reelection PRESS STATEMENT**

### **MARCO RUBIO, SECRETARY OF STATE**

### **MAY 1, 2026**



The United States congratulates Prime Minister Gaston Browne on his electoral victory as Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda. We look forward to continued collaboration with the Government of Antigua and Barbuda to advance shared priorities, including to strengthen regional security by deepening cooperation to counter illegal immigration, transnational criminal organizations, and illicit trafficking. Enhanced collaboration in these areas will support greater stability and security in our hemisphere.

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# CPL FIXTURES 2026

## HOME

 **AUG 9 SUN**  
7:00 PM ECT / 4:30 AM IST (-1)  
**ST. VINCENT**

 **AUG 20 THU**  
7:00 PM ECT / 4:30 AM IST (-1)  
**ANTIGUA**

 **AUG 22 SAT**  
7:00 PM ECT / 4:30 AM IST (-1)  
**ANTIGUA**

 **AUG 23 SUN**  
7:00 PM ECT / 4:30 AM IST (-1)  
**ANTIGUA**

 **AUG 25 TUE**  
7:00 PM ECT / 4:30 AM IST (-1)  
**ANTIGUA**

## AWAY

 **AUG 7 FRI**  
7:00 PM ECT / 4:30 AM IST (-1)  
**ST. VINCENT**

 **AUG 14 FRI**  
7:00 PM ECT / 4:30 AM IST (-1)  
**ST. LUCIA**

 **AUG 30 SUN**  
7:00 PM ECT / 4:30 AM IST (-1)  
**ST. KITTS**

 **SEP 2 WED**  
7:00 PM ECT / 4:30 AM IST (-1)  
**TRINIDAD**

 **SEP 8 TUE**  
7:00 PM ECT / 4:30 AM IST (-1)  
**GUYANA**

## **Conratulations to Prime Minister Gaston Browne of Antigua and Barbuda Penny Beckles**



Congratulations to my brother, Prime Minister Gaston Browne, and the Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party on your electoral victory.

We look forward to continued collaboration in the spirit of Caribbean unity and partnership, and reaffirm our commitment to strengthening ties between our nations.

Congratulations to the Government and people of Antigua and Barbuda.

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2026



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**Date: Saturday 16th May 2026**



**Time: 7:00 PM**



**Venue: St Anthony's Secondary School, Langfords**



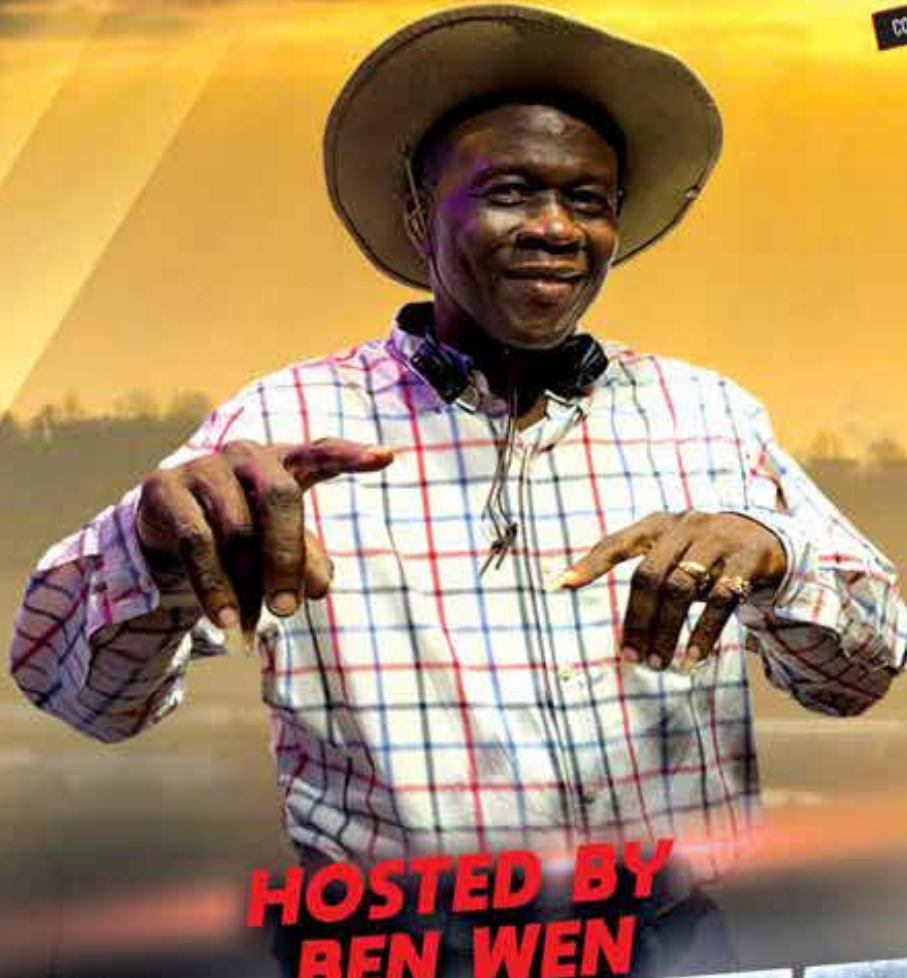
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**WE ARE GETTING STRONGER**

## “75 Years of Celebrating Labour Day: 1951 – 2026”



by  
*President of the AT&LU, Bernard de Nully*

### INTRODUCTION

After several annual attempts, beginning in 1946, by the five minority AT&LU elected members of the Legislative Council, the Executive of the Union, at its January 1951 Annual Conference, passed a unanimous resolution to celebrate **Labour Day 1951** without the benefit of the law.

For four months, following the January 1951 Conference, the AT&LU signalled to all employers and employees across the Presidency of Antigua in the Colony of the Leeward Islands, that 1<sup>st</sup>

of May 1951 would be a day of “no work” by the labourers of Antigua and Barbuda. Millions of workers throughout Europe and other places celebrated Labour Day; such a celebration would be forced, if the Antiguan Legislature would not authorize the holiday.

On that memorable Tuesday morning in May 1951, the workers of Antigua and Barbuda responded by withholding their labour, and by participating in the celebratory events; first, at the Public Market in St. John’s, and then at the historic Fort James. Seventy-five years later, on 4<sup>th</sup> of May 2026, the celebration of Labour Day follows a similar pattern.

Workers will gather at the Vere Cornwall Bird bust at Market Square, listen

to speeches and watch uplifting cultural presentations; then, we will traverse the streets of St. John’s City towards 46 North Street—the place where the velvet revolution was planned and from which place the change-leaders of Antigua and Barbuda emerged, after 1946.

### THE GOVERNOR FOUGHT TO RETAIN OPPRESSION

That defiant 1951 stand by the AT&LU caused capital to blink, and led to the victory of labour in the years following. The colonial Governor at the time was Kenneth Blackburne. He would call for the Welsh Fusiliers—a contingent of 300 soldiers based in Jamaica—to sail across the seas to Antigua, in order to intimidate the Labour leaders. The leaders were not afraid. The soldiers left after three months without firing one shot. The Governor would also introduce a new law governing meetings and processions, restricting the activities of the AT&LU in order to limit its ability to win freedoms. Thinking and manoeuvring adroitly was the hallmark of the anti-colonial leaders of Antigua and Barbuda; they yearned for a better Antigua and Barbuda for their children and knew that freedom was a short wait away.

Blackburne was assigned as Governor to another Caribbean colony in 1956, but returned to Antigua for a visit in

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1969, eighteen years following the Labour Day challenge. He would write to Vere Cornwall Bird—then the Premier of a quasi-independent Antigua—to congratulate the V.C. Bird Government for all the wonderful advances which the country made since his departure after the 1951 crisis. “Now I can see what you were attempting to achieve,” Blackburne wrote in his letter to Bird.

This letter was the only writing found in the late Prime Minister’s bedside drawer; it was evidence that he had outperformed his colonial masters and they admitted to being outwitted. While the colonials chose to intimidate in order to prevent progress, the AT&LU and its leaders demonstrated superior management of the scarce resources and they used the country’s abundant natural beauty to create superior living conditions for its people.

**LUCY ISHMAEL AND AVERYL WINTER**

The struggle over Labour Day 1951 triggered other monumental changes. Two women whom the AT&LU continues to revere are domestic workers who dared to show support for their union.

Lucy Ishmael was fired by her boss on her return to work after the Labour Day celebrations. The AT&LU picketed the business place and the home of the business owner. The Court granted the owner an injunction, preventing the Union from picketing and also imposed significant fines. An Appeals Court upheld the lower court’s judgment.

Averyl Winter was also fired by her boss because of the show of support for her Union. The AT&LU picketed the enterprise with loud support by steelbands and supporters who discouraged customers from entering the business. The lower court ruled against the Union; however, this issue was taken to the highest court—the Privy Council—which ruled that the Union was indeed acting within the law. It was a victory for the Union.

This victory has led to the freedoms which all unions, political parties and citizens enjoy in Antigua and Barbuda—and in the other countries whose apex court was and remains the Privy Council, in London. One is free to picket an enterprise or residence and to try to win public support for any cause without the fear of an injunction or the permission of the Police.

For one year following, the workers in the sugar farms withdrew their labour until the wages were increased, and conditions of work made more human. The threat of starving the workers into submission was not to be realized. In fact, like the phoenix, the downtrodden would rise from the ashes.

**CONCLUSION**

Two lowly workers, who barely earned enough to feed their families,

were willing to risk loss of income for the support of their newly-formed trade union. A leader who showed fearlessness was able to win the heart and souls of his people, and for fifty years, to lead a movement that transformed a nation. The sacrifices of workers across the country have led to a trade union that has enjoyed 87 years of brilliant existence, transformed the colony into a high performing small island developing state with the potential of becoming an economic powerhouse under a new leader.

May the God of our forebears continue to provide the wisdom, knowledge and understanding to drive the AT&LU forward after 75 years of its victory over oppression. ***Long live the AT&LU!***

**AT&LU “De Labour Mix” Competition!**



## THE BIG PUSH SERIES

*Five Op-Eds on Economic Sovereignty, Inclusive Growth, and the New World Order the Caribbean Must Build*



**By Prof. C. Justin Robinson**

*Pro Vice-Chancellor & Campus Principal  
The University of the West Indies Five  
Islands Campus  
Antigua and Barbuda*

### THE BIG PUSH IN FIVE SENTENCES

1. Doubling GDP means nothing if young men remain outside the formal economy.
2. Sport is not welfare, it is an undeveloped industry cluster worth building.
3. Our culture generates global value. We capture almost none of it. That must end.
4. Energy sovereignty is how the Caribbean stops paying twice, in diesel and in devastation.
5. No one is coming. Civil society must move before the state will follow.

An invitation to conversation for the private sector, civil society, and citizens of the Eastern Caribbean  
April 2026

THE BIG PUSH SERIES | OP-ED 1 OF 5

**Growth Is Not Enough. The Caribbean Needs a Push That Reaches Everyone.**

*By Prof. C. Justin Robinson: Pro Vice-Chancellor and Campus Principal of The University of the West Indies Five Islands Campus, Antigua and Barbuda*

In January 2023, Governor Timothy Antoine of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank stood before the ECCU on the Bank's fortieth anniversary and asked a deceptively simple question, what would it take to double the size of our economies over the next decade? He called it the Big Push! Two years on, with the ECCB having formalized that ambition into its 2026-2031 Strategic Plan under the banner of Collective Action for Shared Prosperity, the region owes itself an honest answer, not applause, not cynicism, but the clear-eyed reckoning that the moment demands.

This series is offered not as a set of answers but as an invitation to a conversation the Eastern Caribbean must have, urgently, honestly, and with the full breadth of its people in the room. It is written in solidarity with the ECCB's ambition and in a serious refusal to pretend that ambition alone, or growth alone, is sufficient. The Caribbean has known periods of growth before. What it has not yet produced is growth that reaches the young man with no formal employment, the woman navigating an economy not designed for her, the community that watches prosperity arrive and depart without stopping. Growth that does not do those things is not transformation. It is rearrangement.

*The old liberal world order has collapsed. No one in Washington, Brussels, or Beijing is designing its replace-*

*ment with us in mind. Each will arrive with terms. The question is whether we are rule-setters or rule-takers.*

### The world has changed and not in our favour

The liberal international order that provided the backdrop for Caribbean development since the end of the Cold War is being dismantled in real time. China is here as a serious development partner; the Gulf states are arriving through sovereign wealth investments in Caribbean assets; the United States operates through security frameworks that condition aid on compliance. No one is coming to save us on our terms. The choice is not between engagement and isolation it is a choice between shaping the terms of engagement and accepting them. In the current context, The Big Push is not merely a development strategy, it is a survival and sovereignty strategy.

### Growth is necessary but it is not enough

*Dwayne, 24, in Kingstown, St. Vincent, has completed secondary school and two short vocational courses. He has applied for 47 formal jobs in three years. He received three interviews and zero offers. He now drives a taxi he does not own, earning EC\$150 on a good week, EC\$40 on a bad one. He is not counted as unemployed, the survey classified him as "self-employed, informal." The official GDP figures include the fare he collects. They do not include the fact that he has*

*no pension, no health insurance, no pathway to credit, and no reason to believe the economy will ever need him. Dwayne is not a statistic, he is the test. If the Big Push cannot change his conditions, it has failed no matter how many decimal points the growth rate adds.*

This series pushes further than the growth target and asks, double for whom? Between 2000 and 2019, the OECS posted growth in most years. Yet male participation in tertiary education fell steadily, youth unemployment remained stubbornly high, and energy import bills drained household budgets. The informal economy expanded not because people preferred informality but because the formal economy offered no serious alternative. Growth without direction is like rain without roots, it runs off before it can nourish.

What the Big Push must target, explicitly and measurably, is growth across four dimensions simultaneously. First, male inclusion in the formal economy, not as a political gesture but as an economic necessity. A region losing a significant portion of one gender to violence, informality, and emigration operates at a fraction of its productive potential. Second, gender equity in access, ownership, and leadership because the evidence is unambiguous that broader participation makes economies grow faster and distribute better. Third, sustainability because an economy built on fossil fuels in a region of intensifying hurricanes and bleaching reefs is not building wealth, it is borrowing against a future it is simultaneously destroying. Fourth, economic sovereignty, the capacity to make choices about development on our own terms, not the terms of whoever arrives with capital. These four dimensions are not competing priorities they are the same priority viewed from four angles. The three pillars of this series, sports, cre-

ative industries, renewable energy, were chosen precisely because each address all four simultaneously.

## **The question tourism must answer**

Any honest conversation about Eastern Caribbean transformation must ask what the dominant industry owes the Big Push. The Eastern Caribbean is one of the cruise capitals of the world. Millions of visitors pass through our waters annually, generating revenue that flows overwhelmingly to foreign-headquartered companies. The linkages to local economies, through food, craft, culture, and professional services, remain thinner than they should be after decades of effort. Can international hotel chains develop genuine career pathways from entry-level to management and ownership for Caribbean people? Can the tourism sector lead the renewable energy transition that would reduce its own costs while relieving the import burden on every household on these islands? These are not rhetorical questions they are the opening of a negotiation the Caribbean has been too deferential to start.

## **The implementation deficit we must name**

There is a pattern in Caribbean development this series would be dishonest to ignore. Excellent frameworks are produced, launched at conferences, endorsed by governments, and filed alongside the previous excellent framework. The gap between Caribbean policy and Caribbean practice is not a gap of intelligence or ambition, it is a gap of accountability. The Big Push will join that graveyard unless it is accompanied by an accountability architecture as serious as the analytical one: public dashboards tracking metrics quarterly, parliamentary debate requirements,

and independent civil society audit mechanisms with the standing to report publicly when implementation falls short. Without them, the conversation ahead will end the same way too many Caribbean conversations have ended, with a communiqué, a commemoration, and very little change.

## **An invitation, not a verdict**

The pieces that follow are not written by someone in possession of all the answers. They are written by someone who believes, on the basis of evidence rather than sentiment, that the conditions producing Caribbean underperformance can be changed. What questions should we be asking that we are not? Which communities are missing from this conversation? What does the tourism sector need to hear, and what does it need to say, for this partnership to become real? These questions cannot be answered by this series alone. They require the churches, the trade unions, the diaspora organizations, the young man on the training ground, and the woman running a mas camp on credit, all of them at the table, and all of them treated as architects, not audiences.

No one is coming to build this for us on our terms. But if we build it together, with the honesty this moment demands, it might finally be built to last. So let us measure carefully and then, together, let us make a big push.

*Next in the series: Sport as an industry. Tune into the ECCB's 10th Annual Growth and Resilience Dialogue — Big Push Conference, April 22–24, 2026.*

THE BIG PUSH SERIES | OP-ED 2 OF 5

## Stop Budgeting Sport as Welfare. Start Capitalising It as Industry.

By Prof. C. Justin Robinson: Pro Vice-Chancellor and Campus Principal of The University of the West Indies Five Islands Campus, Antigua and Barbuda

*Kemol, 19, in St. George's, Grenada, benches 120 kilograms and runs the 400 metres in 48 seconds. He has never had a formal job but he has been offered cash to 'run something' for someone else twice this month. The sports economy we are not building is the difference between Kemol representing his country at the Olympics and Kemol representing a case file.*

Walk through any village in the Eastern Caribbean on a Saturday morning and you will find them, young men, mostly, working with precision and dedication that would impress any corporate talent scout. They are shooting hoops, perfecting soccer dribbles, pumping serious weights, training with a seriousness the formal economy has never managed to elicit from them. The formal economy, for its part, has barely tried. It has classified their domain as recreation, budgeted it as welfare, and then expressed bewilderment when those same young men, finding no legitimate pathway to status or income, migrate toward the only economy that has consistently offered them both.

The Eastern Caribbean's male crisis is structural, not cultural. Young men are disengaged because the structures available to them were not designed for their starting points, their learning styles, or the

reality of their lives. The street economy has simply been more responsive to what young Caribbean men actually need than anything the formal sector has offered. But sport is not a social intervention, it is one of the most underdeveloped industry clusters in the Caribbean economy, and the moment to build it is overdue. This is also not only a male story. Women coach, manage, administer, and provide sports medicine. They face distinct barriers, access to finance, institutional credibility, unpaid labour burdens, that a serious sports economy strategy must address. The architecture proposed here is for everyone.

***Caribbean athletes produce world-class value. The Caribbean economy captures almost none of it. That is not a natural condition. It is a policy choice we have simply not reversed.***

### The conceptual shift that unlocks everything

Sport is classified, budgeted, and administered as welfare. It does not appear in investment frameworks the way tourism does. It does not attract development financing the way energy infrastructure does. This is an analytical error with serious economic consequences. A genuine sports economy is an industry cluster with multiplier effects across professional services, tourism, media, education, and manufacturing. The Eastern Caribbean possesses extraordinary raw material for such a cluster. What it lacks is the architecture to convert that raw material into durable value and the political will to build it before the next generation of talent emigrates to find it elsewhere.

*'Yes, but our athletes just leave anyway.'*

They leave because the architecture to monetize their talent does not exist here. Jamaica retains more of its track talent than it did a decade ago, not because Jamaicans stopped migrating, but because MVP Track Club and ISSA created professional pathways at home. Migration is a symptom, not a cause.

### Four layers of a Caribbean sports economy

The first layer is physical infrastructure, regional training centres of excellence attracting athletes from across the OECS and the diaspora year-round, generating income in sports medicine, nutrition, coaching, and hospitality. When the temperature in London or Toronto makes outdoor training difficult, the Eastern Caribbean is ideal. We are sitting on a year-round competitive advantage we have never seriously tried to monetize.

The second layer is professional services. Every competitive athlete needs sports medicine, physiotherapy, legal representation, financial management, and coaching. These professional services are either not provided, done so on an amateur basis or sourced abroad. The network of community colleges across the OECS, UWI Five Islands Campus, UWI Global Campus, Ross University, St. George's University, and the American University of Antigua are positioned to be the academic home of this layer, offering applied, work-based degrees in Sports Science, Sports Business Management, and Sports Law, flexible, competency-based, and tied to real industry experience from day one.

The third layer is events and tourism monetization. A coordinated regional calendar, cricket, athletics, football, water sports,

combat sports, marketed to the Caribbean diaspora in the UK, Canada, and the US can generate significant foreign exchange. Here the tourism sector's obligation becomes specific: cruise lines and international resorts should feature Caribbean sporting events and sports tourism products as part of their core offerings. The cruise capital of the world should be asking what it contributes to the sports economy of the communities it visits.

The fourth layer, where the sovereignty argument is sharpest, is broadcasting and intellectual property. Caribbean athletes attract global audiences. The broadcasting rights, streaming deals, and content licensing are enormous and the region captures almost none of that value. A regional sports media entity that aggregates broadcast rights and monetizes Caribbean athletic identity is not a fantasy, it is a policy choice we have simply not made.

### Finance and accountability

Sports SMEs, training academies, sports medicine clinics, event management companies, athlete management firms, do not fit conventional bank lending criteria: irregular cash flows, intangible assets, no fixed collateral. The young man who wants to build a legitimate sports business cannot get a loan. The ECCB and the Caribbean Development Bank must develop instruments for this sector, IP-backed lending, revenue-based financing, small-ticket venture capital. We have the money in the domestic banking sector. What accountability mechanisms will ensure that a regional training centre, once announced, is actually built? What metrics will tell us, quarterly, whether the sector is growing or stalling? These questions separate a serious strategy from another well-intentioned document.

### What success looks like by 2030

Two regional training centres operating at 70% occupancy year-round

Sports SME lending portfolio of EC\$50M across OECS banking institutions

At least one Caribbean-owned sports media entity with annual broadcast rights revenue exceeding EC\$5M

Youth male unemployment in target communities reduced by 8 percentage points

### The call to action

#### For the private sector:

*Stop sponsoring jerseys and start investing in academies. Develop IP-backed lending products for sports SMEs. Cruise lines and international*

*resorts ask publicly what you contribute to the sports economy of the communities you profit from.*

#### For civil society:

*Convert underused halls and grounds into structured training environments. Partner with UWI Five Islands and regional community colleges on work-based pathways. The coaching relationship is one of the most powerful development interventions available invest in it deliberately.*

#### For citizens:

*Demand that your government treats sports as economic infrastructure with a budget line. Watch local events*

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*and pay for them. Every seat filled at a local competition is a data point that argues for investment.*

The young people on those Saturday morning training grounds are not a social problem awaiting management. They are an economic asset awaiting investment and a question the Caribbean has been deferring for too long. The sovereignty argument gives us the urgency, the inclusive growth imperative gives us the moral obligation, what we need now is the will to act.

*Next in the series: The Creative Industries. Tune into the ECCB's 10th Annual Growth and Resilience Dialogue, April 22–24, 2026.*

THE BIG PUSH SERIES | OP-ED 3 OF 5

## They Are Getting Rich From Our Culture. We Are Getting the Receipt.

*By Prof. C. Justin Robinson: Pro Vice-Chancellor and Campus Principal of The University of the West Indies Five Islands Campus, Antigua and Barbuda*

*Simone, 34, in Kingstown, St. Vincent, has designed carnival costumes for nine years. Her 2023 section sold out, 600 costumes at EC\$800 each. She earned less than 10% of that revenue after paying her sewers, her*

*materials, and her camp rent. She cannot get a loan because she has no collateral and the bank does not recognize her intellectual property as an asset. The system is not failing Simone, it was never designed for her to succeed.*

In 2023, a major European fashion house debuted a collection described by its creative director as deeply inspired by Caribbean carnival. The beading, the featherwork, the chromatic boldness, all of it traceable, unmistakably, to the design traditions of Grenada, Barbados, Antigua, and St. Kitts. The collection sold out by the way! The designers who developed those traditions across generations in mas camps from Port of Spain to St. John's earned nothing from it. Not a licensing fee, not a credit, Nothing. This is not an isolated incident, it is the operating model and it will continue to be the operating model for as long as the Eastern Caribbean treats cultural production as identity (which is crucial) rather than as industry.



The Eastern Caribbean generates music, carnival design, festival aesthetics, culinary tradition, and storytelling at a rate and quality genuinely disproportionate to its size. That production shapes global popular culture and the region captures a fraction of the commercial value it creates. The rest flows to intermediaries in cities where our artists go to be discov-

ered and our culture goes to be commodified. This is not a cultural grievance, it is an economic sovereignty crisis. In a world where the old protective rules are collapsing, developing, owning, and monetizing our cultural production is no longer a development aspiration, it is a survival strategy.

***We are the creative engine. Someone else cashes the cheques. In a new world order with no rules, that arrangement will not correct itself, we have to correct it.***



### Who is doing this work and who is being left out

The Eastern Caribbean's male crisis has one conspicuous exception, the cultural industries, where young men are fully present. The recording studio, the mas camp, the barbershop that doubles as a creative hub, spaces where young men demonstrate the entrepreneurial instinct and drive the formal economy has never harnessed. But the creative economy is not a male story alone. Carnival design,—the sector defining the Eastern Caribbean's most globally recognized aesthetic export, is disproportionately led by women. It is women who conceptualize the sections, manage the mas camp logistics, and deliver the spectacular productions that set

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the international standard. They do this without formal business structures, trade finance, or IP protection. Studies consistently show women face higher loan denial rates in comparable creative sector businesses not because their businesses are weaker, but because the financial system was not designed to assess them. A serious creative industries strategy must centre these women, not treat them as background context for someone else's story.

## Completing the value chain

The diagnosis is precise. The Eastern Caribbean has the front end of a cultural value chain, extraordinary creativity, deep tradition, global brand recognition and almost none of the back end. The music is made here, when developed, the royalties are collected in London. The costumes are designed here and the licensing revenue goes to the brand that appropriates the aesthetic. The stories are ours but the film rights belong to the production house that optioned them for less than the cost of a mid-range car. Completing the value chain requires action at three levels: legal and financial literacy, copyright registration, publishing administration, sync licensing, systematically absent from Caribbean education systems; physical and digital infrastructure, recording studios, post-production facilities, distribution platforms owned within the region; and diaspora market access, the Caribbean diaspora in the UK, Canada, and the US is the most underutilized export market in the region's development history, with demonstrated willingness to pay premium prices for authentic Caribbean creative products.

## What tourism owes the creative economy

The cruise ships passing through our waters carry tens of thousands of visitors briefly exposed to Caribbean culture through carefully managed port experiences. The terms of those encounters, cruise line-controlled port areas, preferred vendor arrangements, shore excursion economics, largely determine who benefits. The question this series puts directly to the cruise industry and the international hotel sector: what is your genuine contribution to the creative economy of the communities you operate in? Not a cultural evening, not a logo on a flyer but procurement commitments, IP licensing arrangements, platform access for Caribbean artists, investment in the creative manufacturing infrastructure that would allow Caribbean designers, musicians, and filmmakers to supply the tourist experience rather than merely decorate it.

## Carnival: the industry we keep treating like a party

The women and men who design the carnival sections that define the international aesthetic of the art form operate without formal business structures, trade finance, or IP protection. The same designs that sell for thousands of dollars per costume at Notting Hill Carnival were conceived by someone in St. John's or Bridgetown who cannot get a bank loan. A Carnival Economy Development Initiative — coordinated through the OECS Commission, financed through the CDB, with UWI technical support and a deliberate gender equity mandate could within five years transform carnival design from a seasonal informal sector into a year-round creative manufacturing cluster. The question is not whether this is feasible. It is whether the institutions involved will finally move from endorsement to implementation.

## What success looks like by 2030

- Regional Creative Industries Academy operational 500+ artists trained annually in IP and business literacy
- Women-led carnival design enterprises accessing EC\$20M in trade finance annually across the OECS
- Caribbean-owned digital distribution platform generating EC\$10M+ in annual royalty repatriation
- Diaspora market exports of Caribbean creative products doubled from 2025 baseline

## The call to action

### For the private sector:

*Banks must develop IP-backed lending products designed for creative sector cash flows. Cruise lines and hotels must move beyond decorative cultural programming to genuine creative procurement, buying Caribbean, investing in Caribbean infrastructure.*

### For civil society:

*Trade unions must organize into the creative sector; these workers need collective bargaining power more than most. Universities must provide legal and business literacy to artists as a standard community service. Diaspora organizations must build market access pipelines, not just remittance channels.*

### For citizens:

*Stream Caribbean music deliberately. Buy from Caribbean designers. Attend local cultural events and pay what they are worth. A region whose own citizens do not value its cultural production cannot credibly ask the world to do so.*

The world already loves what we make. The question is whether we are ready to own it, economically, legally, institutionally. The region that builds that ownership

will have something no external actor can take away and the region that does not will keep getting the bill.

*Next in the series: Renewable Energy. Tune into the ECCB's 10th Annual Growth and Resilience Dialogue 22–24, 2026.*

THE BIG PUSH SERIES | OP-ED 4 OF-

## Stop Paying Twice: The Energy Sovereignty Imperative

*By Prof. C. Justin Robinson: Pro Vice-Chancellor and Campus Principal of The University of the West Indies Five Islands Campus, Antigua and Barbuda*

*Marcia, 52, in Roseau, Dominica, has worked as a hotel housekeeper for eighteen years. Her electricity bill has tripled since 2015, though she uses the same appliances in the same two-bedroom house. She has watched three hurricanes damage her roof, her community's school, and the road to her mother's house. She knows the sea is closer to her front step than it was when she was a girl. What she does not know is that the sun hitting her roof for eight hours a day could power her entire home for EC\$50 less per month if she could afford the up-front cost of solar panels. No bank in her town offers a small, low-interest loan for a household system. No utility has a payment plan that recognizes that her EC\$300 monthly bill is already more than she can bear. Marcia is paying twice once in diesel, once in devastation and the energy transition she hears about on the news has not arrived at her meter. The Big Push cannot claim success until it has.*

Every time an electricity bill is paid in the Eastern Caribbean, a quiet transfer of wealth occurs. The money flows, through the utility, through the fuel importer, through the refinery, through the trading

house, to fossil fuel exporters who had nothing to do with the Caribbean and owe it nothing. This happens every month, across every island, consuming nearly a fifth of the region's import bill and placing a floor on the cost of doing business that no domestic policy can easily lower.

The Eastern Caribbean did not cause climate change. Its carbon emissions across the entire history of industrialization are, in global terms, rounding errors. Yet its people live with the full and compounding consequences, hurricanes of intensifying violence, coral reefs bleaching, coastlines eroding, agricultural seasons becoming unpredictable, and pay energy bills calculated on fossil fuel prices their consumption does not move. This is not merely inefficiency, it is injustice. The Caribbean is paying twice, once in devastation, and once in diesel.

***Energy independence is not a green aspiration. It is the most tangible act of economic sovereignty available to the Eastern Caribbean right now and the most direct path to putting money back in working people's pockets.***

### Sovereignty first

A region that generates most of its electricity from imported fossil fuels is a region whose economic policy is partly set by OPEC decisions, by shipping route disruptions, by the geopolitical calculations of countries with no stake in Caribbean prosperity. Every dollar rise in the oil price is a tax levied without consent and collected without representation. Energy sovereignty is not an environmental preference. It is a precondition for

meaningful economic independence. The Eastern Caribbean sits atop extraordinary renewable resource endowments: solar irradiance among the highest in the world; commercially exploitable wind resources across the northern and eastern islands; geothermal potential in Dominica and St. Kitts and Nevis that could supply baseload power to the entire sub-region through an interconnected grid. The constraint is not technical, it is financial, regulatory, and political and all three are tractable if the will exists.

### Jobs as justice and male inclusion

The installation, maintenance, and operation of solar arrays, wind turbines, and geothermal plants is skilled, technical, place-bound work. It cannot be offshored, it requires electricians, engineers, project managers, and construction workers who must be physically present in the communities they serve. This is precisely the kind of structured, recognizably important work that young Caribbean men, the ones the formal economy has abandoned and the informal economy has recruited, are capable of and are not being offered. A regional renewable energy skills pipeline, developed jointly by OECS governments, the CDB, regional community colleges, UWI Five Islands Campus, and the private sector, would create thousands of jobs: competitive pay, portable skills, and the technical identity and institutional belonging that young men need and that the formal economy has consistently failed to provide. Energy transition is not just climate policy it is the most credible male employment strategy these islands have available.

### What tourism owes the energy transition

Hotels, resorts, and cruise ships are

among the largest energy consumers in the region and, in most cases, among the largest importers of fossil fuels. What is their obligation to the energy transition of the communities that host them? A hotel installing rooftop solar reduces its own operating costs. A cruise line powering shore operations from renewables rather than diesel generators stops externalizing a cost onto the communities it visits. An international resort investing in grid-connected renewable infrastructure contributes to the sovereignty of the island that hosts it and earns a social licence that purely extractive tourism cannot claim. The Big Push needs the tourism sector at this table.

## Justice and financing in the new world order

The climate justice case is unimpeachable, small island states that contributed least to the climate crisis face the most severe consequences. However, the Green Climate Fund, the Loss and Damage mechanism, and the multilateral development bank concessional windows have consistently underdelivered. In the new geopolitical environment, those mechanisms face further pressure. The Caribbean cannot wait, it must build domestic and regional financing mechanisms, green bonds, renewable energy investment funds, regional energy utilities structured to attract institutional capital, to finance its own transition on its own terms. The Pacific and Indian Ocean small island states have begun to access blended finance structures combining concessional development bank lending with green bond issuance backed by projected energy cost savings. The OECS can do the same, with the ECCB and CDB as the institutional anchor.

*‘Renewable energy is too expensive for small islands.’*

Solar is now cheaper than diesel across every relevant metric. The upfront capital problem is real — which is why this series calls for green bonds and blended finance, not unfunded mandates. The question is not affordability. It is access to capital structured for our context.

### What success looks like by 2030

Renewable energy share of OECS electricity generation exceeds 50% across all member states

Regional renewable energy skills pipeline certifies 2,000+ technicians annually

Household energy costs reduced by at least 25% from 2025 baseline in all member states

Regional green bond programme operational with EC\$500M in issuance

### The call to action

#### For the private sector:

*Invest in renewable energy as economic infrastructure, not CSR. Utilities must accelerate grid integration for rooftop solar. Hotels and cruise lines, publish your renewable energy commitment to host communities, with timelines and targets, not press releases.*

#### For civil society:

*Trade unions must negotiate renewable energy skills training into workforce development agreements. Community organizations must advocate for energy cooperatives. Environmental organizations must connect the climate justice argument to the economic sovereignty argument as they are the same argument.*

#### For citizens:

*Install solar where you can. Join energy cooperatives where they exist. Demand that your government publishes its renewable energy transition timeline with milestones. Every household*

*that reduces its fossil fuel dependency is undertaking an act of economic sovereignty and an act of justice.*

Renewable energy is how the region stops paying twice. It is sovereignty, jobs, and justice in a single investment. In a world where no one is coming to save us on our terms, that is exactly the kind of investment we must make for ourselves.

*Next in the series: Curing the Implementation Deficit and the call to civil society. Tune into the ECCB's 10th Annual Growth and Resilience Dialogue April 22–24, 2026.*

THE BIG PUSH SERIES | OP-ED 5 OF 5

## The Big Push. Build It Like We Mean It.

*By Prof. C. Justin Robinson: Pro Vice-Chancellor and Campus Principal of The University of the West Indies Five Islands Campus, Antigua and Barbuda*

*Aaliyah, 19, in Castries, Saint Lucia, is finishing her associate degree in media production. She loves the sound of her own language, the rhythms of Lucian carnival, the view from Vigie Beach at sunset. She also knows that the only job offers she has seen are part-time, minimum wage, and unrelated to her training. Her cousin in Toronto works as a production assistant earning CAD\$45,000 with benefits. He sends money home every month and pictures of snow. Aaliyah does not want to leave but she has not been offered a reason to stay that is serious, specific, and durable. The Big Push is not a slogan to Aaliyah. It is the answer to a question she will answer within twelve months: does this region want me enough to build something I can belong to? If the answer is no, she will join the 70% of OECS tertiary graduates who already work outside the subregion. That is not a brain drain it is a verdict.*

This final piece is not addressed to governments. They have been addressed sufficiently by the ECCB, by development economists, by international financial institutions, by decades of development plans that described exactly what needed to be done and were then filed alongside the previous plan. This piece is addressed to everyone else: the private sector, the churches, the trade unions, the diaspora organizations, the universities and community colleges, the media houses, and the individual citizens who have been waiting, consciously or not, for the state to lead the transformation the Eastern Caribbean needs. The wait is over, not because the state has stepped up, but because the evidence of forty years is conclusive, waiting produces too little, too slowly.

*The state will follow when civil society moves. In forty years of Caribbean development, it has never once led when civil society stood still.*

## The Implementation Deficit Disorder we must finally cure

Let us name the pattern honestly. The Eastern Caribbean has produced excellent frameworks, the OECS Economic Union, the CARICOM Single Market, various national development plans, and now the Big Push, with a consistency that should, by now, have produced transformed economies but it has not happened! The gap between Caribbean policy and Caribbean practice, what we might call Implementation Deficit Disorder, is the defining development challenge of our time. Electoral cycles reward the announcement of initiatives rather than their completion. Institutional memory dissolves when governments change, financing gaps open between the plan and the budget and a

political culture, across the ideological spectrum, has learned to treat the gap between promise and practice as normal.

Breaking this pattern requires an accountability architecture: public dashboards tracking Big Push metrics quarterly; parliamentary debate requirements that put those metrics on the record annually; and independent civil society audit mechanisms with the standing to name, publicly, when implementation falls short. Not as partisanship but as democracy doing its job. Regulatory levers also exist that no government has yet pulled, procurement preferences for local creative content, renewable energy mandates with enforcement timelines, banking act amendments requiring disclosure of lending to sport and creative SMEs. If voluntary partnership fails, these must be the next tools.

## Who benefits from the status quo and what changes it

Political will does not materialize from within governments alone, it is produced or blocked by the political environment in which governments operate. That environment includes structural interests benefiting directly from the absence of transformation: the import-distribution oligopoly whose margins depend on continued import dependence; political financing networks tied to incumbency; media ownership patterns that create incentives to soften accountability journalism. These are not villains, they are rational actors in systems that reward their behaviour. Changing the outcomes requires changing the systems: legislative changes that unbundle energy monopolies; procurement reforms that open sports and creative industry investment to competitive bidding; and fiscal transparency mechanisms, like the Fiscal Responsibility Oversight Committees in Antigua and Barbuda and St.

Vincent and the Grenadines, that make the political economy of inaction visible before the next election, not after.

## The tenth island: the diaspora as actor

The Caribbean diaspora is the region's most underutilized development asset. Policy frameworks treat it primarily as a source of remittances which is the least of what it represents. The nurse trained at T.A. Marryshow Community College working night shifts in Manchester; the engineer from Saint Lucia building infrastructure in Canada; the creative professional from Antigua running a production company in Toronto, these are not people who left. They are the tenth island, a virtual member state with capital, skills, networks, and a genuine desire to contribute if the institutional vehicles existed. Those vehicles must be built by civil society, because governments have consistently failed to build them.

## Three vehicles that exist elsewhere and can be adapted now

Diaspora Infrastructure Bonds modelled on Ethiopia's EC\$500M bond for the Grand Renaissance Dam. Issue a regional bond listed on the Eastern Caribbean Securities Exchange, minimum subscription EC\$500, with social dividends (naming rights, studio credits) for larger investors.

Skills Corps modelled on the African Diaspora Skills Corps, a regional platform matching diaspora professionals (sports medicine specialists, music producers, renewable energy engineers) to six-month residencies at home, with travel and stipend funded by diaspora contributions.

Investment Circle: a diaspora angel network operated through UWI Five Islands Campus, making



Republic Bank  
**CPL**  
CARIBBEAN PREMIER LEAGUE

# 2026 MATCH SCHEDULE

FRI 7 AUG	JKM		v		ABF	7:00 PM	ST VINCENT
SAT 8 AUG	SKNP		v		TKR	7:00 PM	ST VINCENT
SUN 9 AUG	ABF		v		SLK	7:00 PM	ST VINCENT
TUE 11 AUG	JKM		v		BR	7:00 PM	JAMAICA
WED 12 AUG	SLK		v		SKNP	7:00 PM	ST LUCIA
THU 13 AUG	JKM		v		GAW	7:00 PM	JAMAICA
FRI 14 AUG	SLK		v		ABF	7:00 PM	ST LUCIA
SAT 15 AUG	JKM		v		TKR	7:00 PM	JAMAICA
SUN 16 AUG	SLK		v		BR	7:00 PM	ST LUCIA
TUE 18 AUG	JKM		v		SKNP	7:00 PM	JAMAICA
WED 19 AUG	SLK		v		GAW	7:00 PM	ST LUCIA
THU 20 AUG	ABF		v		SKNP	7:00 PM	ANTIGUA
FRI 21 AUG	SLK		v		JKM	7:00 PM	ST LUCIA
SAT 22 AUG	ABF		v		TKR	7:00 PM	ANTIGUA
SUN 23 AUG	ABF		v		GAW	7:00 PM	ANTIGUA
TUE 25 AUG	ABF		v		BR	7:00 PM	ANTIGUA
WED 26 AUG	TKR		v		SLK	7:00 PM	TRINIDAD
THU 27 AUG	SKNP		v		JKM	7:00 PM	ST KITTS
FRI 28 AUG	TKR		v		BR	8:00 PM	TRINIDAD
SAT 29 AUG	TKR		v		GAW	7:00 PM	TRINIDAD
SUN 30 AUG	SKNP		v		ABF	7:00 PM	ST KITTS
MON 31 AUG	TKR		v		JKM	5:00 PM	TRINIDAD
TUE 1 SEP	SKNP		v		BR	7:00 PM	ST KITTS
WED 2 SEP	TKR		v		ABF	7:00 PM	TRINIDAD
THU 3 SEP	SKNP		v		SLK	7:00 PM	ST KITTS
FRI 4 SEP	GAW		v		JKM	7:00 PM	GUYANA
SAT 5 SEP	BR		v		TKR	8:00 PM	BARBADOS
SUN 6 SEP	GAW		v		SKNP	10:00 AM	GUYANA
SUN 6 SEP	BR		v		SLK	7:00 PM	BARBADOS
TUE 8 SEP	GAW		v		ABF	7:00 PM	GUYANA
WED 9 SEP	GAW		v		SLK	7:00 PM	GUYANA
THU 10 SEP	BR		v		SKNP	7:00 PM	BARBADOS
FRI 11 SEP	GAW		v		TKR	7:00 PM	GUYANA
SAT 12 SEP	BR		v		JKM	8:00 PM	BARBADOS
SUN 13 SEP	BR		v		GAW	7:00 PM	BARBADOS
WED 16 SEP	ELIMINATOR - 3 <sup>RD</sup> v 4 <sup>TH</sup>					7:00 PM	BARBADOS
THU 17 SEP	QUALIFIER - 1 <sup>ST</sup> v 2 <sup>ND</sup>					8:00 PM	BARBADOS
FRI 18 SEP	QUALIFIER 2 - WINNER ELIMINATOR v LOSER QUALIFIER 1					7:00 PM	BARBADOS
SUN 20 SEP	FINAL					7:00 PM	BARBADOS

# Feature

small-ticket equity investments of EC\$10,000–EC\$50,000 in sports and creative SMEs, with technical assistance bundled in.

## What each of us must do

The churches retain an institutional reach no government ministry can match being present in communities the formal economy has abandoned, commanding moral authority among populations that have lost faith in political institutions. A church that converts its hall into a recording space, its land into a community solar installation, its school into a site for work-based creative industries education, that is a church doing the lord's work in the language the moment requires. Trade unions must organize into the new sectors, sports, creative industries, renewable energy, because workers entering those sectors without representation will enter without the protections organized labour exists to provide. The regional community colleges and UWI Five Islands Campus must design programmes for the economy being built, not the one inherited: work-based, flexible, competency-recognizing, reaching the people the formal education system has failed to hold. The independent media must cover the Big Push with the rigour its stakes demand, not the press conference coverage that treats every announcement as a delivery.

And to citizens: economic sovereignty is built in the daily choices of ordinary people. Where you bank matters, what you buy matters, what you demand of your elected representatives matters and whether you stay matters. The decision of the talented young Caribbean person to build at home rather than export their capacity is, in aggregate, the most consequential

economic choice this region faces.

***Inclusive growth, social justice, and economic sovereignty are not aspirations for some future Caribbean. They are the terms on which we must build today or we will not build at all.***

## The verdict on ourselves

This series began with a commendation of the ECCB's institutional courage and ends here with a question, what will we do with this moment? The people who need this most, the young man with no formal employment, the woman on the five-thirty bus, the student choosing between staying and leaving, have not been formally asked, but their lives are the argument and the accountability test. In a new world order where no external patron is designing our prosperity into their strategic plans, the Eastern Caribbean has exactly one reliable source of transformative energy: itself. Its people, its institutions, its diaspora, its cultural production, its natural endowments, its regional solidarity.

No one is coming to build this for us on our terms. That is not a lament, it is a liberation if we choose to treat it as one. We build it because we must, we build it because the alternative, continued dependence, continued extraction, continued managed decline, is no longer acceptable in a world that has stopped pretending it owes us anything. Build it like we mean it, because this time, we can't afford not to.

## Ownership Scorecard: Where Do You Stand?

*Before you put this series down, answer these honestly. The Big Push needs owners, not readers.*

### If you are a bank or financial institution:

Does your institution have a sports, creative industry, or IP-backed lending product? If not then by when?  
Has your institution developed a green finance product accessible to households, not just large commercial operators?  
Can a carnival designer or a sports academy owner walk into your branch today and access working capital?

### If you are in tourism or hospitality:

What percentage of the food served on your property or vessel is sourced from Caribbean producers?  
What is your renewable energy commitment to the community whose coast you operate on?  
How many Caribbean nationals does your operation employ at management level and above?

### If you are a church leader or civil society organization:

Is any underused property your organization controls generating economic value for young people this quarter?  
Has your organization taken a public position, with data, on your government's fiscal performance this year?  
Have you mapped the diaspora professionals from your community and invited them into a structured investment conversation?

### If you are a citizen:

Can you name your MP's stated position on the Big Push? Have you asked them publicly?  
Did you spend money on Caribbean creative products, sports events, or locally owned businesses this month?  
Have you had a direct conversation with a young man in your community about what legitimate economic pathways exist for him?

***If the answer to most of these is no, the commitment to the Big Push is not yet serious. That is where the conversation must start, with you, wherever you stand in the OECS.***