

## HURST REPORTS ON CABINET of Wednesday July 21 2021

The Cabinet met both virtually and face-to-face, starting at about 10:15 am and ending at about 5:45 pm. The Cabinet requested the presence of several experts and officials, whose input served to enhance the decision-making of the Executive Body.

**1. The continued management of the Covid-19 disease, occupied considerable time and the intellectual energy of the Executive Body, as the country's leadership determines the best fit for the circumstances which now confront the island-nation.**

**1. i. Thus far, approximately 37,500 adults have taken the first dose of the vaccine that has been available to the population of men and women; an additional 30,000 adults are required to take the vaccine in order for Antigua and Barbuda to have achieved "herd immunity", it is estimated. Although the issue of "vaccine hesitancy" challenges all countries where the take-up of the vaccine has slowed, the Cabinet has agreed to implement additional measures to incentivize more persons to become vaccinated. Without mandating the taking of the jabs, the Cabinet took a series of measures to move the un-vaccinated adults to the vaccinated column, to enable the rebounding of the economy by the re-opening of the tourism market --both arrivals by sea and air-- without endangering the working people who will most assuredly come into contact with the visitors.**

**1. ii. All frontline government officials, to include the Immigration and Customs workers, Port Health workers to include the greeters and the nurses and doctors, the EMS workers, the Police and the ABDF personnel, vendors and businesses that provide services to the Cruise Passengers in Heritage & Redcliffe Quays, Tour Operators and Taxi Drivers and others who are employed by the public sector who are compelled to have contact with those arriving at our ports, shall be vaccinated or shall be compelled to have themselves tested twice per month for Covid-19 using approved Antigen Tests. The vaccination is cost-free, the testing is at the workers' expense.**

**1. iii. The Cabinet is of the view that there is also a political element at work, seeking to prolong or worsen the economic fallout from the Covid-19 disease in order to gain an advantage. In the hopes of experiencing an economic collapse by the contraction of the highly-dependent tourism sector, there are those who deliberately discourage the taking of the vaccine by spreading falsities and engaging in scare-mongering. The Cabinet reminds that no-one has suffered injury among the 37,500 that have taken the first jab in Antigua and Barbuda; and, those who have been inoculated by the double dose of the vaccine maintain good health and are not hospitalized nor face death by the various strains of the virus. The most deadly of the strains of the Covid-19 virus--the Delta Strain--has not yet been detected as present in Antigua and Barbuda; but, the issue is "when" will it arrive? Not "if" the strain will arrive. The only defense against this highly transmissible and deadly variant of the Covid-19 virus is the double dose of the vaccines being administered in Antigua and Barbuda. Every adult is encouraged to take the vaccine in order for the hotel workers to return to their jobs, for the**

government's revenue to increase, for the store owners to re-employ workers that have been on furlough, for imported goods to increase and port revenues to rise, for farmers to have a ready market for their produce, and for domestic peace to be restored, is to take the vaccine in order to make everyone safe.

1. iv. **The Government will end the use of Jolly Beach as a quarantine center and isolation unit on July 31, 2021, and divert those nationals and returning residents to check into a hotel at their own expense, or requiring those in exceptional cases determined by Port Health Officials to utilize the rooms available at the former U.S. Base at Coolidge.** The imminent growth of overnight tourists arriving at the V.C. Bird Airport has compelled the administration to place both Jolly Beach Hotel and the Halcyon Cove Hotel to be put back into service for visiting guests as soon as possible.

1.v. **The seven new cases of reported diseased persons, reflected on the most recent dashboard, are made up of four imported persons who had negative PCR Tests, and three residents all of whom were un-vaccinated.** This group poses a threat to the revival of the economy and to the good health of the vulnerable people among us.

2. **The Cabinet has decided to remove India and the Dominican Republic from the list of states whose nationals were once barred from landing in Antigua and Barbuda.** In fact, all persons who have taken the double dose or who are designated as fully vaccinated, and who have taken a negative PCR Test within 7 days of arrival on Antigua, will be allowed to proceed to their bio-secure spaces. In the case of students, they are to proceed to their medical schools where the institutions' strict protocols are to be obeyed.

3. **Rapid antigen tests will be acceptable in those instances when receiving states so allow them to be used by those returning to their countries of origin. The hotels will be required to provide this service to their guests, since the tests cannot be safely provided at the airport's departure lounge,** the Cabinet decided. The disposal of medical waste, the inability to reverse the number of persons with whom an infected person would have been in close contact by the time the status is discovered at the airport, the possible pandemonium which a crowded departure lounge could generate, and the spread which could have inflicted harm on the unsuspecting checking-out and waiting-to-board passengers, compelled the Cabinet to end testing at the airport. Each passenger is to be made aware of his/her Covid-19 status before leaving his/her hotel or home. Known, infected passengers cannot board an aircraft which is leaving Antigua and Barbuda.

4. i. **The Cabinet agreed to quickly pay to any nurses the overtime which may be due. The Minister of Health asked for the Cabinet to extend the agreement past March 31, 2021, in order to effectuate the payments requiring this approval,** as promised during the press conference of the day prior, or on Tuesday July 20.

5. ii. **The Cabinet has agreed to do all that is necessary to make the UWI Five Islands Campus to train nurses to fill a global need, not only in Antigua and Barbuda but to meet international demands for nurses.** Those young men and women from the USA and elsewhere who wish to become trained nurses for service

outside of the Caribbean region will receive the necessary training here, thus widening the utility of the UWI-Five Islands Campus and increasing its income from the foreign students coming from outside of the region. All the necessary legislative changes will be made in order to ensure this outcome.

6. The IWF has certified the YASCO track as meeting its high international standards. It is agreed that a new clock will also be purchased to allow YASCO to fulfill all requirements.

**7. The Minister of Public Utilities has agreed that APUA will introduce a basic broadband package at a minimum of 10MBps at a rate below EC\$ 100.00 per month on its Fiber to the Home service.** In a short while, the service is to be introduced by INET. The communities on the north side of Antigua is now ready to convert from DSL, since the infrastructural work is complete. Soon, APUA will have laid the cables throughout Antigua, enabling the best and lowest-cost service in the state. A seabed cable will also connect Antigua with Barbuda to serve the population of residents and visitors who will also require the best service that can be provided.

8. Action is to be taken against the roaming herd of cows regularly seen crossing Queen Elizabeth Highway and Factory Road and even Old Parham Road. Discussions have been held with the owner of the herd. They will be impounded in order to lessen the likelihood of accidents, and will subsequently be sold or auctioned to farmers if the owner does not reclaim the same.

9. Cabinet took note of increased shipping costs and building materials increased costs, resulting from a backlog of containers and vessels that is the result of the Covid-19 global pandemic. Cabinet noted that the increases affect all countries and regions. The impact will be reflected in prices, especially for lumber and steel.

10. The Project Plan for the Barbuda Land Register is now complete. The Project Implementation Team is headed by Mrs. Cecile Hill, Registrar of the High Court as well as Mr. Vernon Bird, Head of the Survey Department, Ms. Sharon Simmons, Registrar of the Land Registry and Mr. Chad Knight-Alexander as the project's Consultant from Barbuda. Appropriate engagements will commence shortly with the MP for Barbuda and the Barbuda Council to familiarize them with the scope of the project. Land on Barbuda was never communally owned, but has always been the property of the Crown. The island was leased up until 1870, and was always under the control of the crown.

11. The Cabinet was made aware of the death of an infant named Mark Jno Baptiste. An autopsy was being carried out and a full investigation is to take place; the results will be made public.

12. The Cabinet was presented with the newest version of the National Youth Policy--a kind of road map for the development of youth across Antigua and Barbuda. The Minister with responsibility for this subject matter, the elected representative of St. George, will continue to implement many of the new strategies which the Policy document encapsulates.