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The State of Play, 2019 and Beyond

Introduction

Its 2019, and the ULP column extends warmest New Year greetings to the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Indeed, while we welcome the year 2019, and we make all sorts of plans and resolutions, we must reflect on the fantastic year and the events of 2018. Indeed we can say without a shadow of a doubt, that as a people, we excelled in 2018, in a number of ways.

We excelled through the operations of the Argyle International Airport, and the ever expanding role of this facility, in the economic development of the country. We excelled through our young people and the way they have been maximizing the benefits of the Education Revolution. We excelled through our developments in the agriculture sector, particularly in fisheries. We excelled through the recognition that this country has received, through the implementing of a professional and well thought out foreign policy. And we excelled as a people, in the way we have been able to cooperate and band together, to support the development work of the government.

Naturally, there is that tiny minority who will continue to bad talk our blessed country, and who for one reason or the other, mainly through a jaundiced thought process and opinions, do not support the many initiatives of the ULP administration. But they cannot erase the actual activities on the ground, where the economic and business pursuits of Vincentians during 2018, indicate that the country is holding its own. It is clear that Vincentians were satisfied with the level of economic activity generated in the State in 2018.

The year 2019

The year 2019 and beyond holds out great economic prospects for the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The Minister of Finance, Hon. Camillo Gonsalves, has outlined three mega projects where the ULP administration will spend in excess of three hundred million dollars. This is more than the construction cost of the Argyle International Airport.

The government will spend in excess of US\$100 million of the geothermal project in the north of the country. The groundwork for the project has already been laid out, and early in 2019, the drilling work will commence, bringing jobs for the people in North Central Windward, and North Windward, in particular. When this project is completed it will serve to reduce the energy costs for Vincentians.

Then the project for the expansion of Port Kingstown will kick off in earnest in 2019, producing jobs for people in the Kingstown area. The ULP administration will spend in the region of US\$145 million on this project, which will expand the port facilities for the country, and provide a much-needed facelift for the area known as Little Tokyo.

Finally, there is the construction of the US\$50 million hotel in the Mt. Wynne area, which will be owned by the government, but operated by an international hotel franchise. It is this project that has the opposition NDP confused and baffled. The Mt. Wynne/Peters Hope Hotel Project Loan Authorization Bill was passed in the House of Assembly in December last year, paving the way for the government to proceed with the loan for the project.

During the debate on this Bill, the NDP made a meal of the proceedings, claiming that there was not enough information available to them on the project. It is indeed sad to see the NDP lying about the project in this manner. They forgot that they had posed two questions in the House of Assembly for an oral answer from the Minister of Finance, Camillo Gonsalves. He provided chapter and verse, in his answer about the hotel project. Clearly the NDP is worried about the impact that this project will have on the constituencies of Central Leeward, North Leeward and South Leeward. For weeks now, one of their attack spokespersons on radio, Margaret London, has spent most of her time on the hotel project. Well people don't throw stones at "flucky" mangoes.

When we total up these three projects we will see that the government will be spending over US\$295 million, some EC\$797 million, more than the cost of the Argyle International Airport. This is the amount of money that will be in circulation, in terms of these projects, up and including 2020. This represents a high level of investment on the part of the government. There will be business opportunities, including jobs, for Vincentians, particularly those who live in the areas where these projects are located.

Conclusion

There are a number of capital initiatives that the ULP administration will implement in 2019 and beyond, apart from these three projects. The government is getting ready to begin the early phase of the construction of the acute referral hospital at the site of the former T.T Joshua airport. There has been a slow down on the development activity for the new city at Arnos Vale, but this year we expect to see a forward movement in this regard.

Similarly, economic activity in the State will increase as the construction sector becomes more active. Many Vincentians experienced an uptick in the economic activity during the just concluded Christmas holidays. Can you imagine two major concerts, on the same day, within three miles of each other, attracting a combine

total of twenty thousand paying customers? Yet we ask the rhetorical question, “where the country getting all that money from?”

Right thinking Vincentians can give you the answer to this question. The answer is that the ULP administration, led by Prime Minister Dr. Ralph Gonsalves, has a record of outstanding and unprecedented achievements, which have benefited every family, and the nation as a whole.

This process of development will continue through the period 2019 to 2022, and Vincentians are already anticipating the economic benefits, and are resolved to keep the ULP administration in office, because of this factor.