

December 6th 2019

The ULP is ready for 2020

Introduction

It's the month of December 2019. The decade is coming to a close, and the ULP administration is getting busy, finalizing plans for the New Year, 2020. Already the ULP administration is engaging the public servants in the preparation of the estimates of revenue and expenditure for the 2020 fiscal year. This will form the basis for the 2020 Appropriation Bill, commonly known as the budget.

These discussions are expected to be very intense, given the work programme of the ULP administration, and the many projects to be completed, with a start date of 2020. Already one of the issues identified by the ULP, is the ability of the state enterprise, to carry out the number of operational activities, to commence the workload related to the projects that have been announced.

Already Prime Minister Dr. Ralph Gonsalves has said that the implementation of these projects will challenge the resources of the State. Indeed, the Minister of Finance, Camillo Gonsalves said during his budget address last year, that "we continue to be challenged by a limited pool of qualified local contractors, all of whom are overstretched...". The general feeling is that there are constraints in the public and private sectors, but the ULP administration is committed to battling these constraints, to ensure that projects are executed in a timely fashion.

2020

It is clear therefore that there will be a high level of construction work in various parts of the State. Work on the Mt. Wynne-Peters Hope project will get underway in 2020, as well as the government hotel at Diamond. The project to expand Port Kingstown will take on some energy, with the re-location of some residents in the Bottom Town area, and the private sector projects at Blacksand in the Keartons area, and the Royal Mill hotel in the Calliaqua area, will get underway.

In the case of the Central Leeward area, some 300 million dollars will be spent between the Marriot project, and the Blacksand resort. This is a financial and economic boost for the people in this area, as well as folks from the constituency of North Leeward, and even South Leeward. There will be jobs for labourers, masons, carpenters, plumbers and electricians.

People in the Calliaqua area are already seeing the construction work as the Rain Forest Seafood Company out of Jamaica, prepares the site for its

operations. This will be a major development in the blue economy, and already our fisherfolk are getting excited over the opportunities on offer.

Amidst the big ticket items in the economy, will be a drive to empower our young entrepreneurs, to provide them with the business skills to make their enterprises more successful. The Education Revolution has given a number of our young Vincentians the knowledge to create their own business opportunities. But in the context of our economy and our society, this knowledge could only take them so far. What is required is a type of mentorship programme to give them the additional knowledge and skills. In some cases, we simply have to hold their hands.

Social Sector

Budget 2020 will also focus some attention on the social sector, and the areas of health, education and pension reform will come into focus. The ULP administration with its “people-centered development focus” will always seek to put people first in all its development work. The elderly must be protected, and the ULP will always ensure that a safety net is in place for this purpose.

Education will occupy a pride of place in the 2020 budget. Never before in the history of St. Vincent and the Grenadines has a government spent more on the educational sector, and the ULP must take pride of place for this effort.

Today, there are more institutions offering children preschool and early childhood education; more children entering and graduating from secondary schools; more children attending and graduating from the Community College; more children receiving Government scholarships and assistance; and more students attaining university degrees than at any point in our history. We also enjoy more schools, more teachers, and more trained educators than ever before.

That the Education Revolution has touched every household in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is beyond dispute. That this Government has committed, forcefully and unambiguously, to investing in the full development of our untapped human potential is an unassailable historical reality that is known to all Vincentians.

Conclusion

To continue the transformation of our economy, we must increase our productivity. We must work hard and smart. We must build resilience. And we must creatively capitalise on education and training to adapt to a rapidly-changing local and global environment.

Looking ahead, we are excited by the massive activity scheduled for 2020, as projects in the formative stages this year blossom into full-fledged

implementation. We have a country to build, and Budget 2020 accelerates our timetable for creating a modern, competitive post-colonial Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

The process of social and economic transformation is neither effortless nor linear. In the 40 years since we reacquired our independence, the global political and economic order has been rewritten. The financial architecture has been restructured, and our previous resilience to weather events has been all but removed. As a Small Island Developing State with high vulnerabilities and limited capacity to insulate ourselves – economically or environmentally – the task of transformation is doubly difficult.

Finally, Budget 2020 will reflect the efforts of the ULP administration, to give a good account to the international community, as the country takes its seat at the Security Council of the United Nations, the smallest nation to do this.