



***The Annual Prime Minister's  
Independence Lecture Series***

**No. 9**

***“Self-Reliance,  
Social Responsibility:  
The Foundations of  
Independence”***

*by*

***Dr. Melvin S. Blanchard***

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**Ladies and Gentlemen,** Kittitians and Nevisians are among the most resilient and aspiring people. My foundation was built here and everything that I have done since stands on it. I am grateful for what this country provided me in the formative years. If I could offer one piece of advice to our young people, it is that what ever you do, do it to the best of your ability, and then aim to make your good better and subsequently, make your better best.

**Introduction:**

On September 19<sup>th</sup>, Kittitians and Nevisians here and around the globe, many of whom are watching or listening to this presentation via traditional and new media, will celebrate the 24<sup>th</sup> year of our political independence.

What is independence? By independence is meant that our nation is not controlled by another. It is self-governing and our people, and more importantly, leaders take full responsibility for the nation's progress and future.

While we remain a part of the British Commonwealth, the attainment of political

independence, the freedom and the prosperity enjoyed in this twin-state nation represent a remarkable victory due in large measure to the work of those who preceded us. As we remember their sacrifice and struggle through slavery and colonialism, let us commit to making conditions even better for the next generation.

The past may not have been good for our ancestors, but the present is better, and the best is yet to come, depending on how we as a people combine our resources and efforts to move our nation up the global ladder and improve our quality of life. A high quality of life in the future is not guaranteed; it will require greater self-reliance and social responsibility.

### **Current state:**

Let us take an inventory of our current state – the post independence era. By external and internal objective and subjective measures, the quality of life in St. Kitts-Nevis is very good. Certainly, we are not where we would like to be, but surely, we are not where we used to be.

One external objective measure of progress is the United Nations' Human Development Index (HDI), an internationally used comparative measure of human development reported annually since 1990. The measure considers literacy and education, life expectancy, and standard of living (measured by purchasing power). It is not a perfect indicator! For instance, it is not robust enough to consider income

inequality. However, it is the best objective comparative measure available. Let us take a look at where we stand with this yardstick. Compared with other countries around the world the Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis has consistently ranked in the highest category for the last three United Nations reports. It is remarkable that in the most recent United Nations report (2006), St. Kitts-Nevis was 9<sup>th</sup> in the Americas, 1<sup>st</sup> in the OECS and second among CARICOM countries. This is an outstanding achievement considering our small size, both in area and population, and relative youth among independent nations. We should be proud.

Among our strengths is literacy and education. The literacy rate for those over age 15 has consistently been 98%. What this means is that our people have the ability to read, write, and do the arithmetic that defines literacy. St. Kitts and Nevis has a universal education system with a reservation for every primary and secondary child in the nation. The investment in education made over the past 40 years has resulted in enviable primary and secondary schools. The tertiary educational system has expanded to accommodate motivated graduates of secondary schools and, with ready access to educational loans, increasingly there are more opportunities for students who want to study abroad. These conditions make St. Kitts-Nevis an ideal place for external and internal investors. We should be proud.

The health care system is improving. Several years ago, the nation built a modern air-conditioned

hospital with more beds, up-to-date equipment and highly trained personnel to operate them. There are now physicians with specialties in many fields and an improved primary health care system. I noted the commendable 14% improvement in infant mortality in 2005 compared with 2000, which was reported by the World Bank. We should be proud.

The economy is good. The economy grew by close to 6% on average annually in the past 3 years, which is above the growth rate of the United States, our major trading partner. Consumer price inflation averaged about 5%, with most of the increase attributed to higher international oil prices. Landownership has improved and there are more home and landowners in St. Kitts-Nevis than ever before. We should be proud.

The tourism industry has become an important component of our economy and even more so since the closure of the sugar manufacturing cooperation in July 2005. I can remember the time when the Tourist Bureau was a small building adjacent to the treasury pier, when there were only a few hotels in St. Kitts and Nevis. Now, there is a revolutionary change with large up scale hotels – the St. Kitts Marriott and the Four Seasons Hotel, Port Zante, souvenir shops, car rentals and taxis. As a result of result of these developments, the Federation has been successful in attracting international conferences, thus providing opportunities for many to earn a living in the tourism industry. We should be proud.

Subjective indicators and consequences of progress, some positive, some negative, are universally visible, palpable and consistent with the external objective measures.

The use of high level communications technology – computers, internet and cell phones is widespread. In 1990 there were no cell phones, just 3 years ago, only 1/5 people had cell phones, now every one is texting and topping up. The same has happened to ownership of computers and internet. Kittitians and Nevisians are fully in the information age. Yes, we should be proud of this progress, but we should use the technology to our advantage in increasing our knowledge with the aim of improving our lives.

More and more citizens are acquiring vehicles and driving to work whether they live in the towns, on the outskirts or in the rural area. Unfortunately, we are burning gasoline and polluting our atmosphere instead of burning calories and breathing clean air. In the days when guava jam and bread were eaten for breakfast, you could easily find a parking spot in town and get from street to street. Now it is faster to walk than to drive through Basseterre but people continue to drive. Thus, the most popular jam you can now find is traffic jam. Traffic jam in the morning, traffic jam at mid-day and traffic jam in the afternoon after work. It is a visible sign that things are better. Should we be proud?

We now have many dining options. We have given up time previously spent cooking. In the days gone by, a young lady could not get married if she

didn't know how to cook. The great test of cooking skill was to turn a piece of corn without making it lumpy and add a nice piece of salt-fish in a delicious sauce. Gone are those wonderful days for many. Now, our young men and women are losing the art of cooking. Instead of preparing some rice and locally grown peas and beans, we find it more convenient to pick up sub sandwiches, KFC and Chinese food. Should we be proud?

### **Past state:**

The quality of life was not always as good as it is today. The people of St. Kitts did not drop from the heavens into this paradise. Our fore-parents survived a long-long struggle as they strove for freedom and independence after it was taken in Africa and they were brought to these two islands.

Let us look at a brief history of the struggle in paradise. Liamigua and Oualie were inhabited by Arawak then by Carib Indians before Columbus arrived 515 years ago in 1492.

One-hundred and forty-two years later, in 1632, the British, led by Sir Thomas Warner, established their first Caribbean settlement in St. Kitts, the reason we are called the mother colony of the West Indies. About five years later, a settlement was begun in Nevis. Within thirty years of the arrival of the British (1660s), the Caribs were wiped out and sugar production was underway, not only in St. Kitts-Nevis, but many other Caribbean islands.

Free Africans were brought on ships, in the transatlantic slave trade, to the islands and sold as slaves to sugar plantation owners. This continued for another 150 years (until 1807), when the British Parliament, under pressure from declining profitability of sugar and men of conscience, passed the act abolishing the slave trade. An act to abolish slavery itself in the British Empire was passed in 1833, but before that many gave the ultimate sacrifice for their freedom and a desire to have a better life for themselves and their families.

Following slavery, there was an uneducated and landless group of Africans and descendants who knew nothing except how to work in the fields. They struggled for decades to build their lives, fight for their rights, compensation, and so on. One hundred years later, not much had changed on the plantation. Wages remained low, workers couldn't own land and had no bargaining power or representation in government. This gave rise to a landmark event, the Buckley's Riots, in 1935. The riots gave rise to the Workers League, the trade union which eventually spread through out the Caribbean. Eventually, as a result of the vigorous leadership, rights were won and conditions improved. The Labour Unions used their power, as representatives of plantation workers, to build political power and improve conditions for workers. Out of this came the current Labor party. Eventually, through the efforts of outstanding leaders such as the late Robert Llewellyn Bradshaw, former Premier of St Kitts-Nevis and Anguilla and leader of

the St Kitts and Nevis Labour party, and other stalwarts, who fought for social justice, the quality of life improved.

The struggle of slaves and subsequently free men and women, the leadership of trade unions and eventually political parties in St. Kitts and Nevis culminated on September 19<sup>th</sup>, 1983, a historic moment, when Political Independence was granted to the State of St. Kitts-Nevis. At that time, a new phase of history was begun. I remember the short shower of raindrops that fell and the words of the then Premier, Dr. Kennedy Simmonds, that the shower was a sign of a blessing from God on our new state. Surely, there has been substantial and consistent progress since then and over the last decade under our present government.

Clearly, the past may not have been good for our ancestors, but the present is better, and the best is yet to come.

### **Future state:**

Though the scourge of slavery should not be forgotten, we must move on from the past. As one writer said, "You can clutch the past so tightly to your chest that it leaves your arms too full to embrace the present." And, I dare say, the future.

Our future depends on the way we manage the resources that we have today. We are not fortunate to have oil, diamonds, silver or gold. We lost king sugar about 2 years ago. But we have our people, we have

our land, capital and the driving force of a dedicated government under the leadership of the Honorable Dr. Denzil Douglas. There are no resources more valuable.

Every human generation before has tried to leave a better life for the succeeding one. Parents in St. Kitts and Nevis have always wanted life to be better for their children than themselves. Our fore-parents invested blood, sweat, tears, deprecation, the only resources they had and we are now the beneficiaries. Unfortunately, we are not able to give the recompense they are due, but we still owe the debt. How can we repay? We do so by shoring up the foundation of our independence for the benefit of the next generation through the resources that we have. Our current state is built on a single nog—the past. We can secure the future of our independence with two other pillars—self reliance and social responsibility—the theme of this year's independence celebrations.

Self-reliance refers to dependence on ones own capabilities and resources. This principle must operate not only at the level of the country as a whole, but and also, and more importantly, at the level of the individual. If we are to sustain or improve upon our current standard of living, our country must advance and better utilize its capabilities and resources—labour, land and capital. Only by better management of these factors, can our economic growth remain positive and our future more secure.

As an independent nation, self reliance means working together to maximize the use of our resources and capabilities to benefit our nation and to move our country and our people forward. There is a role for every corner of society. Government cannot do it alone; it must work in partnership with individuals and the private sector. The role of government is to build a fair economic playing field and foster private investment by the little guy and big business. Government's role is to build and maintain the infrastructure, set policies and rules, and minimize the bureaucracy. It is equally important that government apply the rules fairly and be perceived as such. Whether you are from the town or rural area, from St. Kitts or Nevis, from big company or small company, or whether you are a supporter of the Labour, CCM, NRP, PAM, or UNEP party, and whether you are black, or white should not determine how the rules are interpreted. These conditions empower.

Our people also have an important role to play and must take advantage of the educational opportunities provided in various specialized areas and skills. An educated work force is essential for business success in the knowledge economy. The country needs people with the business and technical skills required for success. It is Government's responsibility to provide outstanding primary and secondary education, but our people must take the initiative to educate themselves, no matter what is his or her age. Our population must far exceed the minimum of being considered "literate." Your aim must be to develop and retain teachers who can help more of our youth

excel in mathematics, the sciences and English which are very important for integrating into the new knowledge economy. I wish to encourage the government to continue to assist motivated graduates of our secondary schools and the Clarence Fitzroy Bryant College in furthering their education. Your commitment to providing opportunities for citizens of St. Kitts and Nevis to achieve a high level of education is commendable. The Development Bank of St. Kitts and Nevis, created by visionary government leadership, has also played a role in making access to higher education overseas possible. This process is part of developing our human resource, a prerequisite for success in the knowledge economy. I commend Minister Sam Condor on his thorough quantitative analysis of the CXC results, his identification of the areas in which we must focus, and his advocacy for improvement. Keep it up!

The Federation has been attracting a number of international universities, including Ross University School of Veterinary Medicine and the International University of Nursing. Government has been successful in securing scholarships for locals to attend these universities. In addition to the educational opportunities offered by these universities, the nation has benefited in various ways, particularly in providing accommodation to students,.

Communication with internal and world markets is essential for progress and fostering an investment climate. Every household and business should strive

to have access to internet services so that they can communicate and do business with the outside world.

Capital is essential for businesses. We cannot start a business without money to purchase land, building, machinery, and the first stock of inventory, and providing workers their first paycheck. It is Government's responsibility to continue to create conditions for entrepreneurs with a good business plan to find reasonable financing options.

Over the years, different Governments in St. Kitts and Nevis have recognized the importance of a positive business climate and have worked hard to create conditions conducive for locals to start their own businesses. With the closure of the sugar industry, more land is now available to locals for farming, housing and other investment. There are a number of commercial banks which are willing to lend for starting a new business deemed financially viable. Who could ask for anything more? The onus is on you, whether as an individual or group with business acumen to seize the opportunities that exist. Self reliance does not mean doing it all on your own; it also means pooling your resources – human and financial – to move forward. We must look at how other countries do it, learn from them and do it better.

Government has doing its part, the entrepreneur must now take over. An entrepreneur is a person who starts a new business, operates it and takes on the associated risks of business. He or she invests his or her time, talent and treasures. Entrepreneurship is often

difficult for many because of the fear of failure. Without entrepreneurship, though, there would be no large or small businesses in St. Kitts and Nevis. The bakcrics, tailors, shoemakers, hardware stores, mechanic shops, small shops, restaurants, top-up, light industry, barber shops in St. Kitts and Nevis are all the results of entrepreneurship. These business owners, small and large, are the engine of the economic activity in St. Kitts and Nevis. Without them, our standard of living would be abysmal. I dare say that they are doing quite well, but there is room for more business a variety of them. There are many potential entrepreneurs in St Kitts and Nevis, but they are afraid to venture and take risks.

For those looking for some heavenly assurance, a passage in the Bible may indicate a special blessing for people who use their time, talents, and skills. In Matthew 25:14-28, there is recorded the parable of the talents which I will paraphrase. In this, a certain man entrusted his 3 servants with money (one with 5 talents, the second 2 talents and the third 1 talent). A talent is the equivalent of \$2,500 EC dollars. So the first servant had \$12,500.00; the second \$5,000.00 and the third \$2,500.00. The first servant started a business and made \$12,500.00 in profit so he increased to \$25,000.00, the second made \$5,000.00 so he had \$10,000.00. The third servant dug a hole and buried his \$2,500.00 and in the end, his money could not buy as much because of inflation. When the certain man returned, he commended the first and second servants saying, "Well done thou good and faithful" and invited them to share in the benefits of the increase.

To the third servant, he said, "You are lazy. If you were afraid to start a business, at least, invest the money by putting it in the bank. At least, you could have earned a little interest and avoid erosion of buying power." The certain man took the \$2,500.00 away and gave it to the servant who had increased his money to \$25,000.00.

The way for individuals to get ahead in this country is not to play the lottery, but to save, invest, venture out and start businesses, either on their own or with a group where the risks can be pooled. The conditions are now right. We cannot do what our grand and great-grand parents did when they were alive—put money in a suitcase or bury it. Some people today are working hard, getting all they can, canning all they get and literally sitting on the lids. There are a number of institutions in which to invest. The establishment of the Eastern Caribbean Stock Exchange is one such avenue where citizens can pool and invest their savings.

If you spot a need, start a business. There are lots of successful businesses in St. Kitts-Nevis started by small entrepreneurs. I heard about a remarkable chap from Newton Ground (Leroy Powell) who, when he saw bottled water on sale, got the idea for his now successful water bottling company employing 32 people. If you are seeking advice, consider consulting with an exemplary entrepreneur—people like the Othniel Hyliger who started a construction company and now has the first 24-hour gas station, Colin and John Mallalieu who are entrepreneurs in

light industry, Sonia Carr who built a successful dry goods store from nothing, Warrington Grant who started an egg farm more than 2 decades ago, Harrington Bristol who is the number 1 man in the number 2 business, Rodney Elliot who started a catering business to feed school children in Nevis, Winston Skeete who started his own inter-island ferry service, Wycliffe John who is the islands self-stated engineer, Victor Williams who started an architectural business. There are countless other small and large businesses too numerous to mention.

The past may not have been good for our ancestors, but the present is better, and the best is yet to come. Not only should our generation leave a wealthier country, but one that is more civil. Our nation as a whole, organizations and individuals have a responsibility to society. The way we treat each other is a key determinant of our quality of life and the atmosphere for business. A positive atmosphere is conducive to external and internal investment.

Quality of life is not measured by how rich and empowered we are, the performance on the United Nations Human Development Index, our GDP, where we live, our educational level, what we drive, whether we have Chippie or Digicel, but by whether we feel safe in our homes and businesses, have a safe environment, feel valued and appreciated by our employers, feel that when we spend our hard earned EC dollar in a store we are treated like a

valued customer, and whether we feel a sense of connectedness with our neighbors and community.

We often feel that everything is government's responsibility, including our social responsibility, but "nutten tall go so!" This is a free country and every single person has control over his or her attitudes, choices and actions. The country cannot put a police officer on every corner. We all must take responsibility.

Parents are responsible for the upbringing and values of their children, not government.

Churches and charitable organizations should help foster positive values.

The media too has to play a role, in terms of social responsibility. The media has helped to enlighten people over the years. However, the media must be mindful of the negative influences, particularly on the youth, from some of the programs aired.

We are individually responsible for the environment; As citizens, we must be aware of the impact on the environment of the fumes emitted from our gas guzzling Sport Utility vehicles that can hardly fit on our narrow streets. We must also be aware of how this is contributing to widening the nation's trade deficit, particularly with the rising cost of oil.

As a physician, I cannot leave here without commenting on the responsibility that we have for our

own health and that of our children. My review of early 2000 statistics indicates a 70 percent increase in obesity among our children. This is likely similar among our adults and will lead to an increase in diabetes, high blood pressure, strokes, and cancer in our population. It is imperative that we pay attention to the health of our children who are the future of this nation. Parents must take good care of themselves so they can take care of their children and must set good examples of a healthy lifestyle. I implore you to exercise, eat well, breathe clear air, drink plenty of clean water, get plenty of rest, and do the same for our children.

Our young people need to be more responsible in their behaviour as it relates to sex and sexually transmitted diseases, particularly HIV-AIDS. The Caribbean ranks second to Sub-Sahara Africa in the case of HIV-AIDS. In many African countries, the average life expectancy is well under 50 years because of the high prevalence of this disease. HIV/AIDS is affecting the age group that is most productive - those who can work and are consumers - which can have an adverse effect on the process of self reliance and independence. I commend our Prime Minister, Dr. Douglas, on his leadership in HIV/AIDS prevention in our Federation and the region. Please continue to educate our youth and adults.

Businesses must take care of their internal customers (employees), the environment and their external customers. It is essential that all businesses create a culture of good customer service. Those that

fail to show appreciation for local buyers will fail to meet the high service expectations of buyers, such as tourists from abroad. Let us practice at home to give good quality service to all, and when the tourists visit, then good service will come naturally.

Government and political parties must continue to consider how laws and its decisions impact the behavior of people and foster civility rather than decisiveness. Communities must cooperate with the police to reduce pockets of crime. I would not want to hear the remark that "it seems safer to live in the USA than to live in St. Kitts and Nevis".

As a nation, we must find ways to include and encourage marginalized young men, in particular, in our society. These individuals are full of energy, strength, vitality, and represent an underutilized asset, but their energies need to be directed to bring about positive developments in the Federation. Concerned citizens are already pooling their intellect and taking initiatives to channel the potential of youth who are engaged in continuous leisure. I encourage them to continue this socially responsible behavior and solicit others to get involved. In this connection, I wish to say that what Washington Archibald is doing at Project Strong is visionary and should not only be applauded, but supported in all its forms. I urge the young men in this Federation to take pride in yourself, take responsibility for your own actions, and try to involve yourself in activities that will advance your life in a positive way and bring benefits to the nation.

Kittitians and Nevisians abroad who have become successful have opportunities to demonstrate socially responsibility in many ways. Many of us closely follow events in St. Kitts and Nevis by reading the free internet news paper publications and listening to the internet radio transmissions. We recognize needs and many of us are capable of assisting in meeting them. Some of us have business and technical skills that can be shared in the structure of a joint venture which would expand markets for products produced in St. Kitts and Nevis. Others may only be able to send remittances – these are also helpful to the economy and those we left at home. We all can do something. I now challenge successful concerned Kittitians and Nevisians, with the training and skills to establish and run a foundation, to work with me in the establishment of a foundation that would competitively fund small grant applications that could improve math, science and english education in the schools of St. Kitts and Nevis.

### **Conclusion:**

The past may not have been good for our ancestors, but the present is better, and the best is yet to come. We have come a long way. We started in Africa as free people, brought forcefully across the Atlantic ocean to slavery on sugar plantations, through the fight for freedom, the struggles in the post abolition era, colonialism and then the achievement of political independence at which time we took responsibility for our future. Truly, we are a resilient people.

Our governments over the years, with the best interest of our people at heart, have built our current infrastructure—advancing us in the areas of education, health, technology, tourism, sports, land and housing, and availability of capital. This has placed us on solid footing. We are now spring-loaded to launch into a brighter future.

We must be reminded that government had to borrow large sums of money for the necessary infrastructure for investment and these debts must be repaid at relatively high market interest rates. If Kittitians and Nevisians do not take advantage of the investment opportunities that exist now, I am afraid that the opportunities will be lost to regional and international investors. In simple language, someone else could begin eating our proverbial lunch if we choose not to eat it first.

A word to our youth in St. Kitts and Nevis - you must recognize your place in history as our next generation. We will soon be passing the baton to you to carry us into the future. The opportunities to be prosperous are truly abundant and diverse. With your energetic spirit, I am confident that you will educate yourselves to compete in the new knowledge economy in areas such as computer technology, science, engineering and business. With this preparation, you will be inventors of the products we use - your future accomplishments could exceed our dreams. I know that you will make us proud.

Now, let us as Kittitians and Nevisians, one people, with a common past and shared destiny, secure

our future with greater self-reliance and social responsibility. The past may not have been good for our ancestors, but the present is better, and provided we develop a culture of self reliance and social responsibility, the best is yet to come.

Good evening and may God bless you and our nation.

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