Keynote Address by Ambassador Jacinth Henry Martin
CPAC Annual Founders Luncheon – October 10, 2026
One Caribbean, Many Shores

Colleagues, friends, and fellow Caribbean professionals, it is my sheer delight to join you today, and to extend my warmest congratulations to the Caribbean American Political Action Committee (CPAC) as you mark 21 years of distinguished service to the Caribbean-American community**,** here at your 2026 Annual Founding Patrons Luncheon.

Your work occupies a particularly important space. It extends beyond the reach of our Ambassadors and the Embassies in which we serve, complementing our diplomatic efforts with something uniquely your own: an understanding of the interests, priorities and aspirations of our Caribbean region, informed by the realities you live and comprehend from both sides of the relationship.

That dual perspective is a special ingredient in the advocacy you bring to the table. You understand the Caribbean from within, but you also understand the environment in which its interests must be articulated, advanced and defended here in the United States.

And underpinning that advocacy is a seminal proposition: that the voices of our small nations matter; that our interests deserve to be heard; and that our size must never determine the weight or legitimacy of our concerns.

But conviction alone is not enough. What distinguishes CPAC is your willingness to be the bearer of that message, to carry it into the spaces where decisions are contemplated, policies are shaped, relationships are built and influence is exercised.

For twenty-one years, you have helped to ensure that Caribbean perspectives are not simply present in the conversation but heard within it. That is meaningful service. That is meaningful partnership. And that is most certainly worthy of our recognition and applause.

The Caribbean has always lived at the intersection of geography and geopolitics. We are small states, but we occupy strategic space. We are deeply connected to the United States through trade, tourism, security, migration, education, finance and, above all, family. Decisions taken in Washington can therefore move very quickly from the realm of foreign policy into the lived experience of a Caribbean household.

Today, that relationship is entering a more demanding phase. Immigration rules are tightening and screening is expanding. Some Caribbean nationals face new visa restrictions or bond requirements. Third-country removals have become a real regional issue. United States policy toward Cuba is testing long-standing Caribbean relationships, including health cooperation. Security threats are becoming more transnational. Correspondent banking remains essential but costly and vulnerable. At the same time, climate change, artificial intelligence, energy transition and the blue economy are reshaping the development choices before us.

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The central question for this conversation is therefore not simply: what is happening to the Caribbean? It is: how do we organize Caribbean capacity, at home and across the diaspora, to influence what happens next? And what practical role can CPAC play in moving us from concern to coordinated action?

1. Reframing the Caribbean–United States Relationship

The United States remains one of the Caribbean's most consequential partners. Yet partnership must be understood as more than proximity. In February 2026, CARICOM Heads and the United States Secretary of State agreed that the relationship would benefit from a 21st-century cooperation framework encompassing migration, security, trade and investment, disaster recovery, human development and technical assistance. That is important because it creates a basis for engagement that is broader than crisis management.

For Caribbean states, the objective should be neither automatic opposition nor passive accommodation. It should be strategic engagement: identify common interests; state clearly where our interests differ; build coalitions around matters of shared concern; and ensure that Caribbean positions reach United States decision-makers before policies are fully formed, not only after their effects are felt.

This is one area in which an organized professional diaspora can be particularly valuable. Caribbean Americans understand both environments. They can translate Caribbean realities into the language of United States institutions and, equally importantly, explain American political and regulatory realities to Caribbean stakeholders.

2. Immigration, Mobility and a New Climate of Uncertainty

Immigration is perhaps the most immediate source of anxiety. The present United States policy environment has brought tighter screening, expanded review of visa applicants' online presence, public-charge initiatives and restrictions affecting several nationalities. Some Caribbean states have been directly affected by partial visa suspensions or visa-bond requirements.
It is important, however, that we avoid creating unnecessary panic by treating every category as though it were the same. United States citizens, dual nationals, lawful permanent residents or green-card holders, temporary visa holders, visa applicants and undocumented persons occupy very different legal positions. Current entry restrictions expressly contain exceptions for lawful permanent residents in relevant categories and, in some cases, for dual nationals travelling on a passport of a nationality not subject to the restriction. But lawful permanent residence is not identical to citizenship, and individual circumstances can matter.
For the diaspora, therefore, information is itself a form of protection. CPAC could establish a standing immigration information programme: quarterly briefings with qualified attorneys; plain-language explanations of policy changes; referral pathways for persons needing individual legal advice; and rapid-response communication when new measures affect Caribbean communities.

This should also include education around travel documentation, prolonged absences by permanent residents, prior immigration violations, criminal records, and the distinction between a

visa, which permits a person to seek entry, and the ultimate decision on admission at the border. The goal should be calm, accurate information rather than social-media speculation.

3. Third-Country Nationals: Sovereignty, Security and Human Rights

A newer and particularly sensitive issue is the United States policy of removing some migrants to countries other than their country of nationality. Caribbean states have become part of this emerging architecture, with several governments entering arrangements or discussions concerning third-country nationals.

This raises difficult questions that deserve serious regional treatment. What precisely are Caribbean states agreeing to? Who is eligible for transfer? What vetting is undertaken? Are persons being temporarily hosted or permanently resettled? Who bears the financial cost? What legal status and freedom of movement do they have after arrival? What happens when a person claims fear of persecution or torture? What obligations arise under domestic law and international law? And what security, social-service and community-integration burdens may fall on very small states?

The United States itself is litigating the legality and due-process requirements surrounding third-country removals. That should reinforce the case for transparency and legal clarity in Caribbean arrangements. CPAC can contribute by convening immigration lawyers, human-rights specialists, national-security practitioners, diplomats and social-policy experts. The objective need not be ideological. It should be to ensure that Caribbean governments have access to rigorous analysis before accepting obligations with long-term consequences.

4. Cuba: A Test of Caribbean Diplomatic Space

Cuba presents perhaps the clearest example of the Caribbean being asked to navigate between history, principle and present-day geopolitical pressure.

For decades, Cuba has maintained deep relationships with Caribbean states through education, technical cooperation and, especially, medical personnel. In some countries, Cuban doctors and nurses have filled shortages in public health systems and served communities that would otherwise have limited access to care.

The United States, however, has intensified its challenge to Cuba's overseas labour programmes, particularly medical missions, arguing that aspects of the arrangements constitute exploitative or forced labour. It is verily believed that visa-restriction policy has been expanded to reach persons, including foreign officials, whom the United States believes are involved in such programmes.

For Caribbean governments, this is not an abstract diplomatic quarrel. It raises questions of health-system capacity, sovereign foreign policy, labour standards and relations with Washington. The Caribbean should be able to hold several positions simultaneously: acknowledge Cuba's historic contribution; defend the sovereign right of Caribbean states to maintain lawful cooperation with Cuba; insist that all workers serving in our jurisdictions enjoy transparent and defensible labour conditions; and engage the United States candidly on the consequences that abrupt disruption of

medical cooperation could have for small health systems. But this is, more easily said than done, admittedly.

The wider principle is important: Caribbean diplomacy must preserve room for Caribbean choices. Partnership with one country should not require the abandonment of legitimate relationships with another.

5. Security Is No Longer Only About Drugs and Guns

The regional security agenda is widening. Firearms trafficking, narcotics, gangs and border control remain urgent. But we must now add cybercrime, financial crime, trafficking in persons, irregular migration, attacks on critical infrastructure, disinformation, climate-related displacement and the security implications of artificial intelligence.

Haiti remains central. CARICOM has repeatedly emphasized that Haiti's security is inseparable from the security and stability of the wider Caribbean. The implications extend beyond policing: governance, humanitarian conditions, migration, weapons flows, organized crime and economic disruption are interconnected.

The diaspora contains considerable expertise in policing, intelligence, military affairs, cybersecurity, law, public health, emergency management and community violence prevention. CPAC could create a vetted regional security expertise roster available for training, policy consultation and short technical missions. That is a practical way to convert professional success abroad into regional institutional capacity.

6. Remittances: From Lifeline to Leverage

Remittances remain one of the clearest expressions of diaspora commitment. Inter-American Development Bank estimates indicate that remittances to Latin America and the Caribbean reached a record level in 2025, while Caribbean flows continued to grow in early 2026, although at a slower rate.

We should never trivialize what those transfers mean. A remittance may be school fees, medication, groceries, hurricane repairs, support for an elderly parent or the capital that keeps a microbusiness alive. It is development in deeply human form.

But we should now ask a second question: can the diaspora's economic relationship with the Caribbean move beyond consumption support to include structured investment? The answer should be yes, provided the instruments are transparent, professionally managed and commercially credible.

The timing is especially relevant. In October 2026, a Caribbean Sustainability Bond was launched with the aim of mobilizing up to US$250 million for climate resilience, renewable energy, sustainable infrastructure and related regional priorities. That points toward a wider opportunity: diaspora bonds, pooled SME funds, community investment vehicles, venture networks and co-

investment platforms that allow Caribbean people abroad to participate in the region's future, not merely respond to its emergencies.

7. Banking, De-Risking and the New Financial Infrastructure

Banking is another area where a technical issue becomes a development issue. Caribbean economies depend heavily on correspondent banking relationships to settle international transactions, process credit cards, facilitate trade and move remittances. The region has long faced de-risking as global banks reassess small markets against increasingly demanding anti-money-laundering, counter-terrorist-financing, tax-transparency and compliance obligations.

The answer cannot be to weaken standards. The Caribbean needs stronger compliance, better digital identity, modern payment architecture, cybersecurity, regulatory technology and greater regional interoperability. But we must also continue making the case that indiscriminate de-risking can create the very opacity regulators seek to prevent by pushing legitimate transactions into more costly or informal channels.

This is fertile ground for diaspora contribution. Caribbean professionals working in banking, fintech, compliance, law, cybersecurity and regulation can help regional institutions understand emerging rules, adopt technology more quickly, and engage United States financial institutions and policymakers with greater technical authority.

8. The Diaspora and the Homeland: Ending the False Competition

There is another issue we must address candidly because it can quietly undermine almost every diaspora initiative: the relationship between Caribbean professionals abroad and professionals who remained at home.

Sometimes the returning professional arrives with genuine enthusiasm but communicates, intentionally or otherwise, that foreign experience is superior. Sometimes the professional at home hears an offer of assistance as an indictment of local competence. Sometimes diaspora qualifications are romanticized; sometimes they are dismissed. In either direction, the result is the same: Caribbean capacity is wasted.

Foreign-acquired expertise and home-honed expertise are not rivals. The person who has spent twenty years in Washington, New York, Toronto or London may bring specialized systems, technology, capital and international networks. The person who has spent twenty years working in a Caribbean ministry, hospital, university, business or community brings institutional memory, cultural intelligence, local relationships and an understanding of what is politically, socially and administratively possible, and often appropriate in phrasing/tone/balance.

The winning model is co-creation. Not *'we have returned to show you how.'* Not *'you left, therefore you no longer understand.'* Rather: *what do you know, what do I know, and what can we build together?*
This is why we should replace the old language of brain drain with a strategic, less negative, at times expression that translates more into '*brain circulation*.' Contribution need not require

permanent return. A surgeon abroad can mentor clinicians virtually. An engineer can review a project design. A professor can co-supervise research. A lawyer can support legislative drafting. A banker can help structure an investment instrument. A technology specialist can train a cybersecurity team. An entrepreneur can mentor Caribbean start-ups.

The new question should not be, 'When are you coming home?' It should be, 'How can your knowledge enter the Caribbean development ecosystem, wherever you live, be it here or there, or both here and there?'

9. Investing in the Future: Green Energy, the Blue Economy and Technology

The Caribbean cannot spend all its energy managing vulnerability. We must also invest in opportunity.

Energy is one such frontier. CARICOM has identified substantial renewable-energy potential across solar, wind, hydro and geothermal resources, while regional work on electric mobility is accelerating. For fuel-importing states, renewable energy is not simply environmental policy; it is fiscal policy, competitiveness policy and energy-security policy. Many of our states are investing a lot of hope and research into geothermal energy, solar energy, and many foreign non-Caribbean professionals are taking note and positioning themselves to sow and to reap!

The blue economy is equally important. The Caribbean Sea is not merely the space separating our islands. It is productive capital. Sustainable fisheries, aquaculture, marine biotechnology, coastal resilience, shipping, renewable ocean energy, marine research and high-value sustainable tourism all require skills, finance and governance.

We should add food security, water security, digital government, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, the creative economy and climate adaptation. These are fields in which the diaspora can help the Caribbean identify technologies, partners, markets and financing earlier rather than entering global transitions after the rules and opportunities have already been defined.

10. A Practical Agenda for CPAC

If we agree that the diaspora should become a more systematic development partner, then CPAC can help build the architecture. I propose six practical initiatives, many of which, I am certain, are not new ideas:

1. A Caribbean Skills Bank: a verified, searchable network of professionals prepared to mentor, advise, teach, serve on boards, undertake short assignments or provide specialist review.
2. A Policy and Advocacy Network: concise, evidence-based, non-partisan briefs for United States policymakers on immigration, security, Cuba, banking, climate, trade and other matters affecting Caribbean interests.

3. A Diaspora Investment Platform: regular deal rooms connecting credible Caribbean projects and businesses with investors, financiers and technical expertise, especially in renewable energy, the blue economy, technology, agriculture and the creative industries.

4. A Mentorship and Leadership Pipeline: structured relationships linking established diaspora professionals with Caribbean students at tertiary institutions, young professionals, entrepreneurs and emerging public-sector leaders.
5. An Immigration and Community Information Hub: trusted legal-information sessions, referral networks and rapid communication when United States policy changes affect Caribbean communities.
6. A Home–Diaspora Partnership Compact: a CPAC principle that major initiatives should be co-designed with institutions and professionals in the Caribbean, with shared leadership, measurable outcomes and respect for local expertise.

Conclusion: One Caribbean, Many Shores

Colleagues, the Caribbean is not short of talent. We are often short of mechanisms that connect talent to institutions, capital to opportunity, expertise to implementation and the diaspora to the region in a sustained way.

The emerging Caribbean - United States relationship will test us. Immigration policy is changing. Security threats are evolving. Cuba policy is creating diplomatic pressure. Financial rules continue to challenge small economies. Climate vulnerability remains existential. Technology is moving faster than many of our institutions. And geopolitical competition is increasingly present in our neighbourhood.

But this moment is not defined only by vulnerability. It is also defined by possibility.

Across the United States and the wider world sits an extraordinary Caribbean resource: doctors, nurses, educators, engineers, diplomats, lawyers, bankers, entrepreneurs, scientists, artists, technologists and community leaders. Your value is not measured only by the money you send home. It lies in the knowledge you possess, the networks you can open, the institutions you understand, the capital you can mobilize, the influence you exercise and the next generation you can mentor. Our task is to convert Caribbean identity into Caribbean capacity and then to expand it even further.

And to do so, we must reject the false choice between those who stayed and those who left. We are not two Caribbeans. We are one Caribbean with talent distributed across many shores.

The region needs its diaspora to engage as partner, with due respect for Caribbean expertise, domestic or global, prepared to listen, willing to invest, ready to advocate, and committed to building.

As CPAC continues to strategize and to organize that partnership with discipline, credibility and purpose, the diaspora can shine even brighter, more than a community abroad, an obvious

extension of the Caribbean's development infrastructure, and one of the region's greatest strategic assets.

Embassies of CARICOM States in Washington DC look forward to joining you in the USA in continuing to build…our region, our Caribbean countries. So let us leave this 21st CPAC Founders Luncheon ever more resolved that, contemporary challenges notwithstanding, neither political rhetoric nor geography will ever be allowed to diminish our Caribbean identity or the power of our collective reach.

We may live on many shores, but our future is shared. And when Caribbean talent at home and abroad joins purpose with influence, expertise with opportunity, and pride with action, there is no limit to what our region can achieve through our people.

One Caribbean. Many shores. One shared responsibility. One powerful future.

Thank you.