

**SPEAKING NOTES FOR THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON. P.J. PATTERSON
AT
AIR JAMAICA'S 'NEW AIRCRAFT' DEDICATION CEREMONY
AT
THE NORMAN MANLEY INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6, 2002**

Salutations:

Let me begin by saying how happy I am to be here to share this momentous occasion with each, and every one of you who are proud to consider yourselves part of the Air Jamaica family.

Today, the word "congratulations" has special meaning. It has special meaning, because the acquisition of an aircraft as impressive as this ~~new~~ A340 is no common achievement.

Coming as it does against the challenges of 2001, this aircraft represents more than a planned addition to your fleet. This A340 is a striking symbol and a powerful testimony to the resilience and vision of Air Jamaica.

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RESILIENCE

The enormity of September 11th's occurrences cannot be overstated – either in terms of the sheer human tragedy, or the resultant economic dislocation.

It has been quite some time since the world has known such uncertainty; it has been a long time since panic has been so rife.

But nowhere has the economic dislocation been more directly felt than in your industry, the Travel Industry.

After September 11, the word “**aircraft**” became a gut-wrenching one to many.

Overnight, large, International Air Carriers slashed their flights by a quarter to a third of their normal schedules.

Overnight, large, established travel wholesales instituted massive staff retrenchment.

Notwithstanding these unprecedented circumstances our national airline regained balance quickly.

Air Jamaica was amongst the first airlines allowed back into the United States, once it re-opened its air space after September 11.

This was because Air Jamaica was amongst the first airlines to meet all the new regulations of the federal aviation administration.

This could not have happened without a firm resolve and superb teamwork.

But, few Jamaicans will wonder how you managed to achieve this, for when it comes to the matter of safety; Air Jamaica's record is second to none!

Ask any Jamaican: he or she will make the same comment: "give me my Air Jamaica pilots and flight attendants any day. No one in the world can land a plane like them!" (Or keep it in the air, I might add!)

But there is so much more that may be said about your resilience.

For one thing, you managed to contain damage to our tourism business by maintaining most of your scheduled flights during that critical period of 2001

Beyond that, you proceeded apace with plans to introduce several new routes. Indeed, 2001 saw Boston, Houston, and Curacao joining the growing number of Air Jamaica gateways – soon to total 25, with the addition of Antigua and Manchester.

VISION

Your vision and optimism are a large part of what has allowed Air Jamaica to press on and thrive, come what may.

And what more compelling example of Air Jamaica's vision and optimism is there, than the business we are about today - the witnessing of your fleet's expansion!

You now boast the newest fleet of any airline in the Caribbean today - fully deserving of the two awards you managed to cop over the last year, the prestigious “Five Star Diamond Award”, and the *World Travel Award’s* “Caribbean Leading Airline” award – an honour bestowed on you for four years in a row.

You have set lofty goals and you have worked hard to achieve them. In so doing, you have been an example and a source of encouragement to businesses and individuals alike during these challenging times.

COOPERATION AMONG STAKEHOLDERS

No destination, regardless of its beauty and diversity, can maximize its potential without the cooperation of all its stakeholders

Survival is not what we are talking about here. What we are aiming at is maximizing our potential. That means surpassing arrival figures, surpassing investment figures, surpassing the size of every major index - year-on-year, every, single year.

To do that; to maximize Jamaica's potential as a destination, partnerships are pivotal.

I must pay special tribute to the staff of Air Jamaica, Tourism Agencies and workers in the Trade from both the private and public sectors. We know that the best strategies could not be put to good use without every team member “catching the vision”

May I encourage you all to “stay on-mission”.

You are on the right track or - should I say - the right route. We are all, by now, very mindful of the predictions of the *World Travel and Tourism Council*: the economies of the 21st Century will be dominated by three industries, and tourism is one of them. Air Jamaica is well positioned to participate in the New World Economy.

Air Travel, like so much else in life, is not without its period of turbulence.

In rough times, or fair, what matters most is your resilience and commitment to your vision.

And, if past events are any indication of what lies ahead, may I make a prediction of my own –

I predict a bright and promising future for Air Jamaica
- *“The little piece of Jamaica that flies!”*

Again, my heartiest congratulations. May your skies be clear, may success light your path, and may **God** go before you!