

THE PLATFORM OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

PREAMBLE:

As the Virgin Islands approaches the centennial anniversary of its being an unincorporated territory of the United States of America, we the members of the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands are committed to guiding our beloved Islands proudly into a successful, more fully self-governing and politically mature second century as an integrally recognized unit of the American Family where equal rights and privileges are accorded to all citizens, including the right to vote for the president of this nation, regardless of where we live or where we were born. We are proud that many of our achievements of the past, as a territory, are credited to Governors, Senators, Delegates to Congress and members of the Boards of Education and Election who served under the Democratic banner.

Today they have passed the torch to us to provide the bold moral, social, economic and political leadership that will honor their legacy and create a brighter future for our children and future generations.

Therefore we affirm our commitment to continue strengthening our Party infrastructure by restructuring and re-engineering the organization to elect Democrat servant-leaders at all levels in these challenging times.

We affirm our commitment to Democratic candidates who abide by the Democratic principles contained herein. We affirm the right of every person living in the US Virgin Islands to the protection of their life, individual freedom and property; access to quality and affordable health care; a quality and relevant education that includes all skills to prepare them for fulfilling employment; jobs and entrepreneurship opportunities that enable them to provide a life of dignity for themselves and their family. We further affirm their right to responsible and responsive government that is transparent, accountable and free of corruption. We assert that affordable health care and retirement with dignity is a right for all people; and we are committed to the preservation of the rule of law and the preservation and optimal development of the institutions of community and government that have fueled and secured the progress we have achieved thus far.

Under the US Constitution, the laws of the Virgin Islands of the United States and the Charter and By-laws of the Democratic Party, we the members of the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands do hereby dedicate ourselves to the furtherance of these ideals and the preservation of the inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all of the people of the US Virgin Islands.

ENSURING HONEST LEADERSHIP AND OPEN GOVERNMENT:

The people of the Virgin Islands deserve a government which is responsive, transparent and accountable and acts in the best interests of all of the people. We recognize that there are immediate needs that must be addressed, the impact of today's decisions on the future must also be taken into account.

We believe that democracy works best when it is participatory and we call for an inclusive process to develop a strategic plan for each Island and the territory as a whole.

We assert the right of everyone to work in a job they qualify for and to be treated fairly in hiring, contracting and awarding of grants or other government offering.

Employees have the right to expect that their work environment will be safe, that the structure they work in would be in good physical condition and free of contaminants that could be injurious to their health.

ESTABLISHING SECURITY AND SAFE HOMES AND COMMUNITIES:

The reduction of gun and other violence in our community shall remain a high priority and all federal and any other law enforcement assistance must be brought to bear. But families and communities must play a role and we encourage the development of community crime watch programs.

It is our position that this must begin with prevention programs that are best developed by a broad based government-community coalition and funded by local, federal, private and foundation funding.

We encourage the development and financial support of early intervention programs designed to target youth at risk for the school to prison pipeline.

We take a zero tolerance position on any violations of Virgin Islands' laws.

We support the use and deployment of all available technology for crime prevention and crime solving.

We encourage the use of Homeland security funding for purposes that can provide public safety and prevention and protection programs that focus on crime as well as natural and man-made disasters.

We believe that sentences should be commensurate to the crime committed.

We support and encourage programs starting in junior and high school to expose young people to careers in local and federal law enforcement.

It is our position that the best crime prevention is sound parenting, a college and career ready education and meaningful employment.

We support pay increases for teachers, police officers, and all other Law enforcement officers throughout the Virgin Islands government.

PROMOTING ECONOMIC PROSPERITY IN WHICH EVERYONE BENEFITS:

We support a comprehensive economic strategic plan developed with public input and participation every 3 to 5 years.

Attached to this should be a workforce development plan which will coordinate the educational process of our K through 12 system, trade schools, the University of the Virgin Islands, the Department of Labor and all relevant agencies involved in the planning and design of the curricula that will develop the education and skills required of workers by the existing government and the private sector and the needs envisioned or planned by them in the future. This must be updated every 3 to 5 years.

We recognize that small businesses are a significant job creator and the backbone of our economy. There must be a plan to support this important sector with local and federal programs and funds to expand access to capital, support expanding markets for their goods and services, reduce paperwork, facilitate licensing and other processes and address other barriers to their success.

The Virgin Islands cannot grow without outside investment. The EDA and other programs must be designed so that there are certain, demonstrable gains for the people of the Virgin Islands beyond taxes and charitable donations. Training for jobs and needs of the community at large or on the Island where they are located should be addressed in these agreements.

We urge collaboration between EDA, the RT Park, SBA, SBDC and all relevant government agencies and private sector organizations to ensure that we create and support locally grown businesses that would be suppliers to them.

We feel that the entire economy would benefit if our outside advertising expanded beyond just tourism to include our EDA, RT Park and unique businesses.

We strongly support additional hotels in the St. Thomas St. John district and the development by the government of a major hotel and convention facility as well a sports complex on the island of St. Croix as well as the upgrading to state of the art standards for all sports facilities on all three Islands.

We are committed to develop the South Shore port into a free trade zone and trans-shipment facility on St. Croix.

We will work together to increase cruise ship visits needing airlift to St. Croix, beginning with flights from the Northeast corridor. Affordable, reliable inter-Island transportation is also key to creating the robust economy we envision for the Virgin Islands and there should be government incentives to the entities providing these services.

It is our position that all development must be sustainable (green) and utilize indigenous resources to the greatest extent possible. Its goals must include balance between development and preservation of our natural resources and the enhancement of the lives and livelihood of the people of the Virgin Islands.

ACHIEVING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE/ NURTURING OUR YOUTH:

Our society will rise or fall on the strength of our educational system. Furthermore our children deserve a sound, diverse and competitive education in an environment that is safe, well-staffed and fully equipped.

WE CALL FOR:

The continuous maintenance, repair and upgrading of all school facilities deemed necessary to support the primary and secondary school population.

The upgrading of the curriculum standards to ensure that every high school student graduates college or skills classes and is career ready. The Common Core Standards must be aligned with Virgin Islands standards and Virgin Islands history, culture and civics education must also be included appropriate to grade levels.

A specific and adequately funded effort of the VI Department of Education and the University of the Virgin Islands to develop a cadre of well trained teachers, with opportunity for continuing education.

Improved pay for teachers and other school employees commensurate with level of education, experience and level of responsibility with incentives to keep the best teachers in the classroom.

Measures to provide safe facilities and campuses for students and faculty by securing the premises with the proper enclosures, technological devices and security personnel. A decentralization of management of school districts.

The de-politicizing of our educational system.

The expansion and/or creation of new programs at the university to specifically meet our workforce needs. We support efforts to add a medical school and simulation center and encourage forging alliances with other institutions of higher learning to expand undergraduate and graduate degrees.

Adequate, accessible and relevant high level skills training for Virgin Islands residents, including test taking skills that will be analyzed for deficiencies and strengths to be used in the upgrading of the curriculum and educational system.

Special emphasis shall be placed on Science, Technology, English, and Math. Each Middle School and Senior High School shall incorporate courses in “Critical Thinking” and programs to foster the development of interpersonal skills, including anger management and conflict resolution classes.

Education must also be the vehicle whereby we preserve our culture. No child should be promoted from ninth grade or high school without satisfactorily completing a class on Virgin Islands and Caribbean History befitting their grade level.

We support any credible effort or restructuring to improve student achievement be given due consideration and adopted once community support has been achieved.

Summer school should be made available every year to elementary, middle and high school students who need to make up any deficiencies as well as for students who want to excel in an area.

We call for well-equipped and staffed recreational facilities that are easily accessible and we strongly support the re-establishment of the Youth Commission to recommend and coordinate as well as advocate for all issues concerning the nurturing, education and development of the young people of the Virgin Islands.

BUILDING A HEALTH CARE SYSTEM THAT WORKS FOR EVERYONE:

We declare that health care is a right to be guaranteed to every person living in the Virgin Islands, that the care must be equitable and that efforts be undertaken to eliminate any disparities that exist across economic, racial and ethnic or geographic lines - including between the National norms and those in the Virgin Islands.

All health care facilities must be a safe and healthy place to work.

We stand united for universal health coverage for all residents of the USVI, of which mental health parity and dental care must be a part, and the extension of the provisions of the Affordable Care Act to the Territory.

To ensure this right it is our position that a full revamping of the health care system is required to ensure continuity of care that is fully integrated, with a comprehensive range of services, state of the art facilities and high quality care.

We support the continued transition of the Department of Health into a full-fledged public health and community health agency.

To make this a reality we must continue to advocate in Congress for the lifting of the Medicaid Cap and state like treatment in the match, DSH payments and in S-CHIP as well as full inclusion in the Affordable Care Act and the SSI program for the disabled.

It is imperative that we develop a mechanism to make health insurance accessible and affordable for every resident. Medicaid ACA funds and changed match must be fully utilized to include coverage of workers with low incomes.

We call for a strong, adequately funded, staffed and electronically managed Health Planning and Vital Statistics Division in the Department of Health and a strengthened, well structured, fair Certificate of Need process.

We call for an update of the Health Workforce Needs Plan, and the development of programs in conjunction with the Department of Education and the University of the Virgin Islands to meet the workforce needs that are identified.

We support and encourage the regionalization of health care services in order to reduce the duplication of expensive services and to better meet all of the health needs of our residents. We also support exploring medical tourism as a means to support the best health care for our residents and a new market for increasing tourism.

We advocate for the lowering of the age of eligibility for the Prescription Assistance Program (PAP) to include uninsured disabled persons under 62 years of age and extending it to uninsured children with disabilities, diabetes and other chronic illnesses.

We also support addressing violence and drug addiction through a public health approach.

We assert that prevention is the key to good health and containing costs and therefore urge emphasis on disease prevention and health promotion activities that pertain to all segments of our community with special outreach to those most in need.

We recognize that health does not exist in a vacuum, but is supported or undermined by our socio-economic environment and that for our residents to achieve optimal health then the deficiencies in these areas must also be remedied.

ENSURING SAFE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND THE PRESERVATION OF HOME OWNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL:

We welcome those who chose to live here in harmony and with respect for our culture and traditions, and we must ensure that homeownership remains available and affordable for local residents. It is our position that government, through the Housing Finance Authority and any other entity so charged, must work to ensure that affordable housing opportunities exist for all.

We call on the Government of the VI to enter into partnerships with HUD, USDA, Rural Development and the Federal Home Loan Bank to purchase land and develop home ownership properties across all areas of our territory.

We call for all applicable Federal programs to be made available and adjusted to reflect the high cost of building and living.

We call on all banks and other lending institutions to provide the same offerings they do in other parts of the United States. This includes that all banks in the Virgin Islands must make all aspects of the Veterans Administration loan programs available to all qualified veterans, including land and construction loans.

It is important that Cadastral and any other land ownership records be digitalized and made available to the public so that land disputes can be fairly settled.

Zoning and rezoning must give due weight to nearby and/or affected residents and follow all laws and regulations. Applications for rezoning should be taken out of the Legislative process and be administered by DPNR, possibly through a zoning commission or other such entity, with the provision of appeal through the Superior Court.

We call for the optimal application of our existing authority to levy and regulate property taxes and for an overhauling of the property tax system in such a way that adequately protects the longtime homeowner and their heirs from undue inflation of those taxes. The priority must be to protect homeownership. Special emphasis must be placed on bringing property tax equity to the people of St. John.

We support legislative action for a program to facilitate and simplify probate with special provisions for a system that allows for the repair and upgrading of properties that are in disrepair with arrangements to protect ownership or provide fair compensation according to the desires of the owner/owners.

It is our position that all VI Housing Authority properties be repaired or properly disposed of as a prerequisite to the final transfer of the properties back under the authority of the

Virgin Islands government. In the repair and rebuilding of the VIHA communities we favor single, smaller multifamily units, and mixed income properties and we encourage home ownership. Recognizing the need and their indirect economic benefits we will continue to advocate for a significant increase in the number of Section 8 vouchers.

We support the development of the HOPE VI plans as developed by the Paradise Community either locally or federally or a combination of both and strongly recommend consideration of the same or similar program for other VIHA properties.

We oppose the sale of VI Housing Authority properties to private developers unless low income and mixed income housing is included as a part of that project.

PROTECTING LABOR RIGHTS AND FAIR COMPENSATION:

We believe in and support the right of every worker to join and participate in a union.

We stand for fair labor practices that protect the rights of the employee while avoiding unfair burdens on the employer.

We demand equal pay for equal work including pay equity for women.

We believe that every person already living in the Virgin Islands has the right to be hired first in any job that becomes available provided they are qualified.

We strongly support ongoing training programs to meet today's and tomorrow's workforce needs and that there be summer employment for our youth.

Our goal is that every worker - in or outside of government - should earn a living wage, and have health insurance and a viable retirement plan.

Paid family leave is an important benefit that should be provided wherever possible.

UNITING TO STABILIZE THE GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES RETIREMENT SYSTEM:

It is our position that every VI worker should be enrolled in a retirement program.

We call for immediate attention and action to the current GERS crisis to avoid the catastrophic event of its failure and the severe adverse impact that would have on retirees, workers and our entire economy.

- 1) While we understand that with increased risk in investments comes the potential for greater returns, GERS must curb that practice and make investments based on sound and proven advice

- 2) The VI Government must make its required employer contributions timely and place priority on eliminating the backlog.
- 3) The Governor and Legislature must begin to take remedial action based on actuarial recommendations, beginning with those that are less burdensome to current workers and retirees
- 4) The Governor and Legislature must provide the additional funding required by law and GERS should leverage that to help realize the infusion of revenue it needs to extend its solvency.

PRESERVING A PROTECTED AND HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT:

The Virgin Islands has been blessed with beautiful and bountiful natural resources. While we must develop to meet the needs of the current and future generations, we will do so as responsible stewards of the land and seas that sustain our food, our culture, our spiritual well-being and our history, and as protectors of the air and water that sustain our health.

We call for a moratorium on any development that requires a major zoning change until a comprehensive land and water use plan is in place. The island of St. John should be first to take such action due to the current excessive unplanned development.

We strongly support a tourism product and promotion that emphasizes cultural and historic tourism and seeks to protect and enhance the natural, cultural and historic resources of each Island.

We support the creation of environmentally friendly "green" jobs and a "green economy" in which the VI moves towards a non- fossil fueled based economy in our pursuit of economic stability, sustainability and growth.

We promote and encourage funding of projects that stimulate mari-culture and agriculture. We urge that all private lands enjoying an agricultural exemption on their property taxes be required to increase the agricultural output on their properties.

We will work to have all waters between our three islands come under VI jurisdiction.

In light of the two monuments and the Territorial submerged lands park, we oppose any further permanent closings of fishing grounds and instead support temporary or rotating measures to preserve reefs and fish stock. These decisions must be solely based on

accurate Virgin Islands data and we will support work at the University of the Virgin Islands to re-supply our existing fish population.

We support the National Park System studies now in place, and the creation of a National Heritage Area for St. Croix, as well as a World Heritage site for St. John and Nations Treasures designation for St. Thomas.

We promote the development of a territorial park system that includes areas such as Annaly Bay and Smith Bay Park, as well as any units now under Housing Parks and Recreation that meet all of the requirements.

We oppose the purchasing of land for preservation by private groups unless supported by the relevant VI government agencies and the affected population.

We are already experiencing the impact of global warming and this demands that assessment of our risks and adaptation for climate change begin immediately!

PROVIDING FOR ENERGY AFFORDABILITY, SUSTAINABILITY AND INDEPENDENCE:

Both the cost and the need to reduce greenhouse gases demand that we pursue alternative forms of energy that are compatible with the resources available, including wind, solar and OTEC which we feel provide an avenue for reducing oil dependence in the VI.

We support the advances made by VIWAPA to add renewable energy sources and improve efficiency. We also support the development of an Integrated Resource Plan with the goal of lower costs, maximizing of renewable sources and sustainability and which must be updated every 3 to 5 years.

We support the maximum use of recycling to reduce our waste stream and the demands on our landfills. We encourage that recycling be an engine for the creation of local businesses.

We support the gradual relocation of WAPA in St. Croix to the South shore.

The US Virgin Islands must work towards the global climate change goals that are being set internationally.

DEVELOPING A CONSENSUS ON ELECTION REFORM:

We believe that "symbol voting" should be reinstated and the public educated by both the Election System and the political parties.

We believe that “No Party” (Independent) candidates, as the second largest political group after Democrats, should run in a primary to select seven nominees in each district for the general election to “level the playing field.”

We must adopt the most practical way to have senators run for specific seats to end the practice of party candidates running against each other, whether it be numbered seats or sub-districts.

We believe the time has come to consider the restructuring of our legislature and call for an educational process followed by a binding referendum on the options to do so.

REACHING A NEW LEVEL OF POLITICAL MATURITY THROUGH OUR OWN CONSTITUTION:

We support and call for the adoption of a constitution that unites rather than divides, that reflect the hopes and aspirations of the people of the VI and provides for a body of laws that provide accountability and efficiency in governance and which puts mechanisms in place for better fiscal management.

ACHIEVING OUR FULL IDENTITY AND MATURITY THROUGH A DECISION ON OUR POLITICAL STATUS:

We demand the recognition that persons born in the US Virgin Islands and all of the US Territories are "natural born US citizens" and therefore entitled to all the rights of citizenship including the right to vote for President of the United States.

We believe in the right of the people of the Virgin Islands to Self Determination and will encourage and support community education on the issue of status, and the pros and cons of the different options that are available to us.

In order to move this forward we believe that funding and an entity such as an office or a task force or commission should be in place to coordinate research and the activities to educate and inform the public.

It is our position that a constitution can be adopted before a status determination would be made, and that the adoption under the present Territorial status should have no impact or influence on any future status decision, nor would it preclude it.