



THE PLATFORM OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

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I. PREAMBLE

Remembering with reverence the spirit, courage and determination of our ancestors' fight for freedom and accepting the torch passed on to this generation by former Democratic Leaders, we the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands, the party of Earl Ottley, Ron deLugo, Lorraine Berry, Alexander Farrelly, Walter I.M. Hodge, and Elmo Roebuck, organized under the Charter of the Democratic Party of the United States commit ourselves to maintaining their high standards in service to the people of the Virgin Islands.

Like our country, the Virgin Islands finds itself at a cross-roads of security and insecurity.

We consider it our sacred duty to chart our path safely, securely, successfully and sustainably into the bright future that awaits us.

Thus we remain firm in our commitment to guiding our beloved Islands proudly and boldly into a successful, more fully self-governing and politically mature era as a recognized unit of the American Family where equal rights and privileges are accorded to all citizens, regardless of geography, national origin, religion, race, ethnicity, income level, gender identity and sexual orientation. As we continue our fight for the right to vote for the president of our nation, we affirm our commitment to continue to strengthen our Party infrastructure and expand our base so as to continue to elect and appoint Democrat servant-leaders at all levels and in all sectors of our community. We affirm our commitment to Democratic candidates who are guided by the Democratic principles contained in the National and local Charters, Bylaws and Platforms.

We affirm the right of every person living in the US Virgin Islands to the protection of their life, individual freedom and property; to access to quality and affordable health care; to a quality and relevant education that includes all skills that will prepare them for achieving their vocational and life goals; and for our children a safe and nurturing village that encourages and supports their hopes and dreams for a positive and fulfilling adulthood, to safety and security; to a protected environment that supports optimal health and wellbeing; to jobs and entrepreneurship opportunities that enable them to provide a life of dignity for themselves and their family.

We further affirm their right to honest, responsible and responsive government that is transparent and accountable to the public. We assert that 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.

We recommit ourselves to work unrelentingly for the realization of our vision of a Virgin Islands that is sustainable, resilient and equitable, and is a regional center for commerce, culture and innovation which guarantees the opportunity to all for a high quality of life.

We stand proudly on the many achievements of the past, that are credited to Governors, Lieutenant Governors, Senators, Delegates to Congress and members of the Boards of Education and Election who served under the Democratic banner.

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 pledge 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.

II. 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, all of the time. We recognize that while there are immediate needs that must be addressed, the impact of today's decisions on the future must also always be taken into account.

There must be zero tolerance for fraud, waste, corruption, sexual harassment and any other form of abuse in all branches of our government, its agencies and the semi-autonomous entities.

It is our position that there should be an evaluation of the relevancy and need for the central agencies of government with regard to increasing efficiency of government systems and operations.

We expect that each branch of government will maintain and operate within their statutory authority, as it exercises its checks and balances.

We call for the use of technology to the fullest extent possible to increase the efficiency as well as the transparency of government operations.

We assert the right of everyone who is qualified and applying to work in government to be treated fairly in hiring, contracting and awarding of grants or other government offerings.

Because there are benefits to be gained through collaborations with our neighbors in the Caribbean, we urge the administration to promptly seek Associate Member status in CARICOM.

We believe that democracy works best when it is participatory, and we call for an inclusive process in the development of strategic plans for each Island and the territory as a whole.

III. ACHIEVING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE/ NURTURING OUR YOUTH:

We believe that every child should experience the optimal opportunity to be successful in life. 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 conducive for learning, well-staffed and fully equipped and that utilizes technology to its fullest.

WE CALL FOR:

- Quality and equitable delivery of instruction in an environment that is conducive to learning. Our students, no matter their challenges, should be afforded the opportunity to become the best of themselves.
- The Development of a strategic plan that will provide the condition, instruction, support and learning experience for all students to gain the opportunity to be a successful graduate.
- Fostering a culture where decisions are driven by data to determine the path forward.
- An updated strategic plan for education that includes, adaptations and placement of buildings for climate change as well as demographics, an innovative, culturally based curriculum, and other elements that will ensure that all students receive a 21st century education that prepares them for a career or college.
- The implementation and upgrading of all contents curriculum to ensure that every high school student will graduate college and/or 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 at the appropriate grade levels.
- Summer school for credit recovery and enrichment programs to ensure that our students not only make up what was lost during the pandemic but also to expand and improve their educational experience and achievement.
- The continuous maintenance, repair and upgrading of all school facilities deemed necessary to support the primary and secondary school population.
- Measures to provide safe facilities and campuses for students and faculty by securing the premises with the proper enclosures, technological devices and security personnel.
- Pay for teachers and other school employees commensurate with level of education, certification and experience; and with incentives to keep the best teachers in the classroom.
- Special emphasis to 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 self-monitoring, effective communicator, culturally competent and contributing member of our growing Society. Dems on Board of Education should be on this path.
- Accessible and relevant high-level skills/career 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.
- The expansion and/or creation of new programs at the university to specifically meet our workforce needs. That includes 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.

We support efforts to add a medical school and simulation center and encourage that the University continue forging alliances with other institutions of higher learning to expand undergraduate and graduate degrees.

We must assure the next generation is college and /or career ready for success in in the workplace. Now more than ever, we must make a shift and place emphasis on those contents that will allow our students to be competitive globally.

We urge that any credible effort or restructuring to improve student achievement be given due consideration and adopted once community support has been achieved. We believe that every child should experience the optimal opportunity to be successful in life.

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 conducive for learning, well-staffed and fully equipped.

IV. BUILDING AN ALL INCLUSIVE, HIGH QUALITY HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

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.

We call for the development of a comprehensive, fully integrated healthcare system that works together, that is patient centered, ensures continuity of care, provides all basic services and utilizes technology to expand and coordinate services. We insist on state- of-the-art facilities that provide a high quality of care and that are safe and healthy places to work.

To actualize this, the full breath of Telehealth services must be made available to patients and providers. A territorial Health Information Exchange must also be expanded that connects all health services and ensures patient's privacy and security, also putting them in control of their data.

We stand firmly united for universal health coverage for all residents of the USVI, of which mental health parity and dental care must be a part and where the special needs of persons with disabilities are fully met. Medicaid, ACA funds and changed match must be fully utilized to include coverage of workers with low incomes. The application of 340B and critical care designation to our hospitals should also be pursued, as well ways in which waivers might enable us to improve and expand coverage.

To make this a reality we support the efforts to lift the cap in Medicaid Cap and S-CHIP for state-like treatment in the match, DSH payments and full inclusion in the Affordable Care Act as well as the extension of the SSI program for the disabled.

We must immediately address our community need and right to comprehensive Mental Health Services. We call for the implementation of the Behavioral Health Act of 2022 and recommend consideration that all mental health services be centralized and managed by an entity or entities with experience in mental health care.

We acknowledge the need for a public health approach to any plan to address gun and all forms of violence and drug addiction.

We fully support the development of a Medical school at UVI and call of all agencies of government and the private sector to give it their full support. We applaud the near readiness of the related Simulation Center and look forward to its utilization.

It is our position that the best role for the Department of Health is as a full-fledged public health, data repository, regulatory and planning community health agency rather than one that provides direct services, with the exception of public health related clinics.

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

We strongly support the inclusion of Community Health Workers as an integral part of our healthcare system.

We 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 new market for increasing tourism, as well as expanding health care services

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, the deficiencies in these areas must also be remedied through a community health approach.

V. MAKING “OUR CHILDREN ARE OUR FUTURE” MORE THAN AN ELECTION YEAR SLOGAN

Although it may not be easy, the Virgin Islands needs to return to being the village our children need. This will take viewing every child as our child, because we all have a stake in their growing and developing in positive ways, their reaching their optimal potential and their becoming a responsible, productive and contributing adult. The well-being and the future of our Territory depends on it!

Because parents are their first teachers and nurturers, the Virgin Islands must ensure that they have the opportunity to be financially secured and healthy, and that they have support in their parenting where needed.

This demands that our educational system must provide them the best comprehensive 21st century education in a safe, structural and social environment that includes critical thinking, interpersonal skills development, and that they graduate either college or advanced technical training ready.

Avenues for recreation, for developing talents in sports and the arts, and for pursuing special interests must also be provided.

We believe in “first infraction and you’re in”, which means that parents, teachers and any adult that the youth encounters should be encouraged to note when behavior is in need of intervention and guide them where needed as early as possible.

All relevant government agencies must have the requisite interventions available. All community, professional, Greek fraternity, church and nonprofit organizations also have a role to play.

The reconvening of the youth advisory council is important to giving them a voice in their affairs and that of the Territory as well as honing their leadership skills.

It is also our position that when a person 16 and under is adjudicated, the territory needs to have an established juvenile justice system, that includes restorative Justice and the proper health and social intervention if needed.

VI. ESTABLISHING SECURITY / SAFE HOMES AND COMMUNITIES

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

The reduction of gun and other violence in our community must be 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 support the development of early intervention programs designed to target youth at risk for the school to prison pipeline. We therefore applaud the Administration and Legislature coming together to establish the Office of Gun Violence Prevention.

We take a zero tolerance position on any and every violation 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 enhance 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, and that incarceration must provide opportunity to at least encourage the achieving of a GED, and skills training as well as psycho-social coaching.

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

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

VII. PROTECTING EVERY COMMUNITY AND FAMILY FROM DISASTER

As we face the increasing impacts of climate change, natural disasters of all kinds can be expected to increase in frequency and severity. In anticipation of other pandemics, stronger hurricanes and possible man-made disasters, we expect our government to be “all-disaster” prepared.

Every resident of the Territory should expect our government to be prepared to adapt to lessen impact, to respond immediately and effectively and lead a full recovery process.

This includes an emergency management plan that is exercised and updated based on our experiences and lessons learned. There must also be mitigation to lessen the impacts of whatever may come.

We expect that our government will continue the applaudable efforts to educate the public, increase public awareness of the potential for disasters, and communicate frequently and fully, and that VITEMA and its composite agencies will be fully versed and trained in all FEMA programs. We encourage CERT training for our community at all levels.

Response must be bolstered with MOU’s and other agreements being in place to meet the most likely needs to ensure that response will be timely and effective.

Recovery is often a longer-term project that has been successfully undertaken by the government through effective planning, implementation, efficiency and accountability. Lesson learned from this experience will strengthen this critical process in the future.

VIII. PROVIDING FOR ENERGY AFFORDABILITY, SUSTAINABILITY AND INDEPENDENCE

It is critical that the Board and management at the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority take immediate, substantive and transparent steps to restore the trust of the people of the Virgin Islands.

Both the cost and the need to reduce greenhouse gases to mitigate climate change demand that we pursue and increase the use of alternative forms of energy that are compatible with the resources available. This includes wind, solar and even OTEC which we feel provide an avenue to greatly reduce our dependence on fossil fuel and achieve energy independence in the VI.

We support all efforts by VIWAPA to add renewable energy sources and improve efficiency. We also support the updating of the Integrated Resource Plan, which has the goal of lower costs, maximizing of renewable sources and fostering sustainability, now and 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.

Should a complete restructuring be considered, before sale to a private entity, it is our position that creating a utility cooperative should be given due consideration.

The US Virgin Islands must work towards the global climate change goals that are being set internationally, and the operations of VIWAPA is key to achieving that.

We encourage and applaud the current efforts being taken to decentralize energy production and support the gradual relocation of WAPA in St. Croix to the South shore.

IX. FOSTERING A VIBRANT INNOVATIVE WORKFORCE THAT ENHANCES THE TERRITORY AND OUR PEOPLE

The Virgin Islands Democratic Party has always been a strong advocate for the working people of this territory. We recognize that meaningful employment at fair living wages is good for our workers and our community. We understand that economic growth is matched with fair employment, good wages, safe, clean and healthy workplaces and training opportunities to uplift, up-skill and prepare our workforce for tomorrow's world of work.

Unions: We fully support the rights of working people to organize and join unions and to collectively bargain for fair wages and better working conditions without fear of reprisal from their employers. We support employer-provided pensions as an essential part of retirement security.

Childcare: We support public and private initiatives to provide high quality childcare services, including at work sites. We fully support and encourage that obstacles be removed to create flexible-time work schedules.

Job Training: We support the work of the Bryan/Roach Administrations efforts to expand apprenticeship and on-the-job training programs to help our youth and displaced workers to develop marketable job skills.

Living Wage: We support a living wage to ensure that all workers (including tipped employees) maintain public and private sector jobs that permanently lift the working poor out of poverty to achieve self-sufficiency. We support a minimum wage of \$15/hour that will increase yearly and tied to inflation and the cost of living.

Hire Local: We encourage the use of companies that employ Virgin Islanders on publicly funded construction projects, paying our people prevailing wages on government- funded projects, and partnering with viable Government-approved apprenticeship and other training programs in the community.

We will work to ensure that companies that subcontract are held to high standards by holding those companies jointly liable with subcontracting firms when Virgin Islands workers! rights are violated.

We oppose wages set below the minimum wage for worker with disabilities and we support fully funded, integrated employment programs designed to assist Virgin Islanders with disabilities into workplaces that do not discriminate against people based on their disability. We support access to employment without discrimination of any kind, including those who seek a second chance in our society.

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 designing 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.

X. STABILIZATION OF THE GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES RETIREMENT SYSTEM IS CRITICAL TO THE ECONOMIC HEALTH OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS:

It is our position that every VI worker should be enrolled in a retirement program. We applaud collaborative approach of Democrats to create the special Matching Funds Special Purpose Securitization Corporation. Today because of the implementation of this innovative product, the GERS, and thus our government workers and retirees, are more secure.

This is a critically important step, but we believe there is still a need to restructure our retirement system, and to reconsider its investment process and portfolio.

XI. 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, to work to ensure that affordable housing opportunity exists for all.

We support increasing the Government of the VI entering 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 in the Territory. Further all banks should provide mortgages and other home related owns equitably as they do in other parts of the U.S.

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. We believe that 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.

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 advocate for a significant increase in the number of Section 8 vouchers.

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

XII. PROMOTING ECONOMIC PROSPERITY IN WHICH EVERYONE BENEFITS

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

Tourism will remain a mainstay of our local economy. To ensure that this remains viable, it is imperative that a comprehensive and sustainable plan must be developed to improve our tourism product, which focuses on highlighting the history, culture and natural resources of the Territory, and which ensures that the presence of Virgin Islands residents in this important part of our economy be expanded.

Our being competitive in today's environment requires a new economy based in technology and the optimal use of the broadband capabilities that exist also requires exploring and supporting new indigenous avenues for economic development such as the creative and culinary arts.

We recognize that small businesses are a significant job creator and the backbone of any 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

All efforts must be employed to bring back SBA and MBDA support in the Virgin Islands, not out of Puerto Rico.

All efforts must be employed to bring back SBA and MBDA support in the Virgin Islands, not out of Puerto Rico.

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 benefits that our veterans have earned. All banks operating in the Virgin Islands must fulfill their CRA requirement which must demonstrate substantial benefit to the community.

The Virgin Islands cannot grow without outside investment. The EDA and RT Park 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 support additional hotels on each Island. We call for the public-private development 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 standard for all sports facilities on all three Islands.

Feasibility studies have shown that small boutique hotels and bed and breakfasts are ideal complements to a well-developed tourism product on each island. These should be encouraged with government support as well.

We applaud the establishment of a free trade zone and the agreement in place which have the USVI become the nation's first international open ship registry. This will not only be a welcome job creator, but also potentially place the Virgin Islands at the center of the transshipment economy

We applaud and support the efforts to increase cruise ship visits and airlift to St. Croix, as well as the rest of the Territory.

Affordable, reliable inter-Island transportation, which has been made a priority, 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.

High shipping costs, related to the fact that we are outside of the U.S. customs zone and thus considered international, are an additional burden for our businesses. We recommend a study on the pros and cons of being under the U.S. customs zone to determine if it would be beneficial. If not, we urge pursuing negotiations to try and remove the "international" designation.

We can no longer ignore the potential revenue source of marijuana (or cannabinoids). We applaud the legislation creating the Cannabis Advisory Board which will create regulations for the use of cannabis for medical use, and the decriminalization of small amounts for personal use. We urge continued study on expanding to recreational use and adequate regulation should that occur.

It is our position that all development must be sustainable. 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.

XIII. PRESERVING A PROTECTED AND HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT/ ENSURING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE:

The Virgin Islands have 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, as well as protectors of the air and water that sustain our health.

We call for a comprehensive land and water use plan and urge increased scrutiny on requests for zoning changes until such plan is in place. The island of St. John should be given priority due to the current excessive unplanned development.

Care must be given to communities in the vicinity of the industrial areas. If move of either cannot be accomplished, then methods to protect their air and water must be in place, as well as strict monitoring of any byproducts of said industry.

We oppose the addition of any more land on St John to the Virgin Islands National Park and take the position that the land identified for the school on St. John should be given for the school without an exchange as a first effort; and utilize exchange as a backup to avoid delay in getting the school constructed.

We strongly support the enhancement, development, and use of the Territorial Park System to ensure retention of green spaces and spaces for refuge and recreation, including the use of funding to acquire sensitive or endangered areas. We promote the development of a territorial park system that includes areas such as Annaly Bay and Smith Bay Park, as well as East End Bay in St. John and any units now under Parks and Recreation that meet all of the requirements.

We also oppose the purchasing of any Virgin Islands' land for preservation by private or non-profit groups unless supported by the relevant VI government agencies and the affected population.

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 demonstrate commensurate agricultural output on their properties.

We believe that all waters between our three islands should 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 be island specific. We would support work at the university of the Virgin Islands to re-supply our existing fish population.

XIV. PRESERVATION OF VIRGIN ISLANDS CULTURE AND HERITAGE

The Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands embraces the rich traditions, culture and history that define our people. It is our beliefs, values, and mores that shape the preservation of our culture and distinguish us as proud Caribbean Americans. We are motivated by new discoveries of our ancestral journey from Ghana, West Africa to the Danish West Indies. We revere those who were first enslaved, those who were declared free and left permanent marks of our lineage. Hence, the Virgin Islands of the United States.

As a progressive society, the people of the Virgin Islands have endured internal conflicts and met many outside challenges. We endeavor to prosper especially by sharing a vision to achieve, and a determination to advance the Territory and its! importance socially, economically, and politically in the region.

As the predominant political entity, the Democratic Party will seek to support all efforts to educate and promote the Virgin Islands heritage and culture. We are further committed to the following:

- Education from elementary to post graduate levels. Undoubtedly, this includes classroom instruction and curriculum in the public school system where local authors may be featured. The University of the Virgin Islands, as a land grant institution, should commit to including the study of Virgin Islands history incorporated into its disciplines.
- The promotion of Virgin Islands culture should come in varied form. To that end, we support the development of fine arts formally. We believe that the quadrille dance, local art to include woodwork and related skills, music, sports, storytelling, culinary arts etc. should be taught to any young person interested in the field. A school of fine arts is an attestation of the true meaning of preservation.
- The Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands recognizes the local holidays that are celebrated. We urge that commemorations remain memorable and lasting so as not to lose its value. The erection of statues, and signages and literature should tell our stories. Public libraries should not only chronicle the lives of Virgin Islanders, but also archive and showcase them.
- We support the National Park System studies now in place, and the reintroduction of the bill for the creation of a National Heritage Area for St. Croix. We also support a World Heritage site for St. John and Nations Treasures designation for St. Thomas.
- As the United States Virgin Islands celebrates its 175th Emancipation Commemoration, the Virgin Islands Democratic Party stands proud of this historic accomplishment. Our freedom predates the United States and signifies that we have long championed human rights in the same context as a people. On July 3, 2023, we will join in the official celebration of our freedom. We will participate in activities and events to showcase our rich traditions, culture, and deeply rooted history.

The Virgin Islands' culture and heritage preservation are critical to its evolution. It is equally important to honor and recognize the contributions of Virgin Islanders. We acknowledge the migration of people from across the Caribbean and the globe over several decades. We encourage service to the Virgin Islands from every citizen and demonstrate unity as a legacy to our people and our roots. Our goal is to elevate our homeland's diversity, filled with vibrant stories and possibilities.

XV. ROBUST USE OF TECHNOLOGY TO ENHANCE THE ECONOMY, ENSURE “STEM” (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) AS AN INTEGRAL TO EVERYDAY LIFE, AND SERVE AS AN INSTRUMENT TO ENHANCE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN GOVERNMENT

We have made historic investments to expand educational opportunities for Virgin Islanders by making college tuition free to students at the University of the Virgin Islands, the only Historically Black College and University outside of the 48 contiguous states, and the only one in the nation that offers free tuition.

We believe that Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) should play an important role in advancing VI students in the classroom and in the lab. In order to compete globally, our next generation must be equipped with the tools and skills that lead to the job-creating technological innovations and scientific breakthroughs of the future.

We will equip educators with the requisite funding and resources to provide opportunities for the youth to engage in deeper learning and ensure STEM as integral to their everyday lives. This model would increase the quality of STEM programming, terms, and experiences in the VI and cast a unified vision for what STEM education should look like.

We negotiated an agreement with tech giants to bring low-cost hardware and software to the USVI public schools, and we are working to close the “digital divide,” by providing free WiFi for students in low-income communities.

We believe that establishing free WiFi will help to level the technological playing field, bringing *all* of the islands' students up to speed and preparing them to learn, work, and thrive in the 21st century.

We see expansion of the technology sector as key to the islands' social and economic progress. Businesses need high-speed connectivity to carry out daily operations and interact with the global marketplace.

Determined to create a business-friendly environment in which local and global companies can thrive, we have put technology squarely at the top of the VI economic agenda. And we have instituted a government transparency website (<http://transparency.vi.gov/>), which lists and makes public all financial transactions and payments to vendors.

XVI. 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, which reflect the hopes and aspirations of the people of the VI and provides for a body of laws that ensure accountability and efficiency in governance and which puts mechanisms in place for better fiscal management.

Given the failure of five attempts, we support the adoption of the Revised Organic Act of 1954 as our constitution, with the proviso that any convention that is called can recommend amendments but must acknowledge and accept that any amendments must be congruent with the US Constitution and laws of the United States.

We also urge consideration of alternative approach that would have the Legislature address and amend the Fifth Constitutional Document, passed by that convention, in the areas that were deemed unacceptable by the Congress and resubmit the amended document.

We acknowledge and assert that the adoption of the Revised Organic Act or the amended 5th Constitutional document as our constitution would in no way interfere with our ability to change our status. Should the people of the Virgin Islands adopt a status that moves closer to independence or statehood, further appropriate amendments can be made at that time.

XVII. 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 and run for President of the United States. In support of this we strongly support the overturning of the Insular Cases.

We believe in the right of the people of the Virgin Islands to Self Determination and call for broad, objective and realistic community education on the issue of status, and clear delineation of the pros and cons of the different options that are available to us.

While we are not against making a decision on status before adopting a constitution, we believe that developing a consensus on political status would be a longer-term process. Therefore, we take the position, depending on the intention of the eligible voters, 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 our making that decision.

XVIII. DEVELOPING A CONSENSUS ON ELECTION REFORM

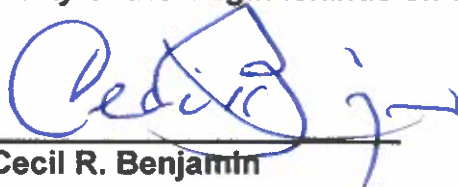
The time has come for us to have senators run for specific seats and to end the practice of party candidates running against each other. We do not here dictate that it be numbered seats or sub- districts. A possible transition could be to begin with numbered seats as we develop sub-districts as our ultimate goal.

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

And we recommend consideration of revising, amending or eliminating the mandatory leave of absence for government workers who run for office.

Adopted by unanimous vote at the regular meeting of the Territorial Committee of the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands on July 23, 2022.

Submitted by:



Cecil R. Benjamin
State Chair, Democratic Party of the Virgin Island

Date: August 10, 2022