

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Christensen's Energy Assistance Bill Gets Green Light from Congress

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With soaring energy costs a major point of contention and all-too-familiar part of everyday life for local residents, Delegate to Congress Donna M. Christensen announced yesterday that the U. S. House of Representatives unanimously voted to approve her bill that would increase energy assistance to all territories, particularly the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The bill, H.R. 83, mandates the Secretary of Interior to put together a team of "technical, policy and financial experts to address the energy needs of the insular areas of the United States and the Freely Associated States through the development of action plans aimed at reducing reliance on imported fossil fuels and increasing use of indigenous

clean energy resources."

Noting that the measure had received support from "both sides of the aisle," Christensen said, "When it becomes law, [it] will help my district and our nation's other insular areas become less reliant on expensive, foreign, imported fuel and address our long-standing energy challenges, which have become increasingly complicated by price shocks and instability in the oil markets over the past few years." She added that H.R. 83 will pick up where the Energy Development in Island Nations initiative left off, which seeks to "help islands across the globe adopt energy efficiency measures and deploy renewable energy technologies," according to the organization's website.

The congresswoman further pointed out that her bill's energy action plans would identify and provide solutions to the Territory's "immediate, near-term, long-term and environmental needs." In addition, she said the plans would provide recommendations on how to improve the Territory's energy infrastructure and its energy efficiency, on a whole, and map out a specific timeline for the roll out of those recommendations.

Christensen, who is the democratic nominee for the upcoming V.I. gubernatorial election in November, received support from House Democrats and Republicans when she testified of the Virgin Islands' staggering energy tab. According to the U. S. Energy Information Administration website, as of Jan. 2012, Virgin Islanders were paying an average price of 47 cents per kilowatthour for electricity, beating out American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands and Puerto Rico.

With the support of her colleagues in the Energy and Commerce Committee, Christensen, who managed all of the Committee's bills that came to the floor for the Democratic side, said her bill was actually passed in July 2013 and they had been trying to bring it to the floor for passage since then. H.R. 83 will now go to the Senate for approval, where, Christensen says, it has "bi-partisan support."

"We are hopeful the president will sign it before the end of the year," the congresswoman concluded.