

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Op-Ed: The Virgin Islands And International Trade Agreements

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This Opinion was submitted to The Consortium today, about an hour before [Congress rejected President Obama's trade bill](#). Mentioning this is critical because while the following opinion can stand on its own and makes a very strong case about the territory's leaders seeming lax attitude towards global trade and its impact on the Virgin Islands, it also ties in succinctly with the now-failed Obama legislation.

TPA, TPP, TTIP. Do you know what any of these are? If you don't, you shouldn't blame yourself. Rather, place the blame on our current Delegate to Congress, Stacey M.

Plaskett, who failed to share her concerns or voice of support for these international trade pacts now being debated in Congress. You should blame our members of the 31st Legislature of the Virgin Islands, who continue to (unsuccessfully) remedy our economic plights with talk and redundant, unhelpful legislation. Or perhaps you could even go as far as to blame our current Governor, Kenneth Mapp, who, while traversing halfway around the world for meetings, does not attempt, in any way, shape, or form, to discuss the potential benefits of these international trade pacts for the Virgin Islands economy.

Let me be clear: as a territory of the United States, we are entitled to the benefits of trade pacts of which the United States is a signatory. We would be entitled to expanded export/import access to the 11+ member countries of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, just as the United States. We would be entitled to the high caliber, uniform trade regulations to be enforced by all member countries within the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), just as the United States. We would benefit from Congress affording the President "fast-track" Trade Promotion Authority (TPA), in order to ensure international trade pacts are negotiated, passed, and signed without the contentious, almost burdensome, political infighting often held in Congress.

Right now in the House of Representatives, Members of Congress are engaged in heated debate over TPA legislation. If TPA passes in the House, as it did in the Senate, the U.S. Trade Representative's Office, the White House, the Department of State, the Treasury Department, and all other relevant agency representatives will have the authority to "cross the finish line" on concluding negotiations over the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). TPP, once passed and adopted by the United States via TPA, would provide a singular regulatory code followed by all signatories that provides high-caliber international trade standards and lays the foundation for future trade growth between the United States and all other member countries.

Too often, Virgin Islanders relegate their vision for success to the shoreline borders of our pristine islands. Less do we focus on opportunities that lay abound outside the realm of the Caribbean.

If the United States can mind the importance of international trade, why can't we? If our Delegate to Congress ran on a platform of "revitalizing" the Virgin Islands economy, why is she not engaging Members of Congress on how such trade pacts can work for us? If our 31st legislature spent thousands of dollars and fish fry after fish fry to be elected on a platform of broadening our economic base, why are they not educating the public on how these trade pacts expand export/import opportunities to the Virgin Islands? If our Governor, with significant experience in consulting (domestic and international), pushed an agenda of "jobs, jobs, jobs" during the campaign trail, why as we, now more than ever, need out-of-the-box thinking and action to get our economy back on track, remains quiet on TPA, TPP, and TTIP?

For too long the Virgin Islands has been relegated to the corner of the United States political/economic machine. Not per the fault of the United States, but by our legislators failing to seek opportunity that exist outside our borders. Now is the time for the Virgin Islands to look beyond our beautiful seas for economic opportunity. Now is the time for Virgin Islanders to pay attention to what happens in the halls of Congress. Now is the time for Virgin Islanders to compel our government to take note of what U.S. trade negotiators are doing to support the U.S. economy. Now is the time to bring the benefits

of international trade pacts to the Virgin Islands. Now is the time to show the world we are here, we are in need, and we are ready to trade with the world.

Submitted By:

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