

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Plaskett: Reducing Greenhouse Emissions Is An Economic Imperative For Territory

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As a community working to modernize our infrastructure and reinvigorate our economy, we understand well, that reducing greenhouse gas emissions is both a matter of ensuring environmental sustainability and an economic imperative.

We also know that this endeavor and our effort to conserve and protect our natural resources require global cooperation and continuous federal support. That is why the President's decision to withdraw from the Paris Climate Accord is disappointing and a missed opportunity.

This decision may ultimately prove costly and consequential for the territory and the other coastal communities most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Under the Paris Climate Agreement, larger nations like the United States, France, Germany and China would make available more than \$100 billion to incentivize the creation of renewable energy industries that would bring jobs and new economic activity to areas like the Virgin Islands.

Historically, conserving and protecting our natural resources has been a means of survival for Virgin Islanders. Our coral reefs and our fertile soil once made St. Croix and the Virgin Islands the breadbasket of the Caribbean and are critical, not only as a source of sustenance and income for our farmers and fishers but also a component of our tourism product.

Today, these resources are already adversely affected by changing weather patterns. Excessively high temperatures have led to more severe droughts, like the one which devastated St. Croix farmers in 2015, causing the loss of thousands of dollars in produce and livestock. It has also led to more severe rainstorms, like the one that washed away sections of a Frederiksted roadway and claimed the life of a resident in 2010, and more intense hurricanes and rising sea levels.

A 2016 report by the Environmental Protection Agency, indicated the sea level has been rising at a rate of about an inch every ten years and is projected to rise one to three feet in the next century. That projection would mean much of downtown Charlotte Amalie could be underwater by the turn of the next century.

In short, the effects of climate change represent an existential threat to the Virgin Islands. A threat by which the government of the Virgin Islands must now prepare to address, perhaps without the full support of the current administration. That means developing an aggressive and proactive plan to not only respond to weather-related disasters but also to pursue partnerships with our local business community and the nations in the Paris Climate Accord toward renewable energy investments in the territory.

Our plan should also include the development of infrastructure-improvement standards designed to mitigate—to the extent possible—damage done by adverse weather events.

In 2015 my office worked to obtain drought support for our farmers and livestock owners affected by climate change activity on our islands. We continue to work with USDA and our local agriculture department to ensure we are part of the drought monitor program.

Additionally, in my efforts to support the local government and the people of the territory on this important issue, I have joined Congress' first ever bipartisan Caucus on Climate Change.

As a member of this caucus, I will work with Congressional leaders to develop policy options that address the impacts of climate change and to create economically viable options to reduce climate risk and protect our economy, security, and infrastructure. Without the Paris Agreement, our local government will need to be the driver for incentives to create jobs and grow renewable energy industries for which the territory is a prime area. Now is the time for aggressive and substantive action against the threat of climate change in the territory. It is an economic imperative.

Submitted on Friday by: Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett

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