

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Sunday Edition | Middle Class Anxiety: Is #AllInWithPetrus The Cure?

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2018 CAMPAIGNS AND ELECTIONS BY TERI HELENESE

On January 28, former senator and 2018 gubernatorial candidate, Allison 'Allie' Petrus' foray and re-entry into politics took the territory by surprise, when he announced his candidacy at Petrus Plaza, on St. Thomas, but inspiration was never hard to find.

Petrus' mother instilled in him values of hard work and sacrifice. He cherishes his mother's example and points to the fire and drive he has which comes from his mom, who supported their family on a \$6,000 school crossing guard salary, while she raised them in a two-bedroom apartment at the Oswald Harris public community.

After serving as a St. Thomas senator beginning in 1995, for three terms in the 21st, 22nd, and 23rd Legislatures, Petrus made his mark and earned positions as secretary and minority leader before stepping down to transition to the private sector.

In lockstep with his wife Beverly, who is his best friend, Petrus has a beautiful family, has built an impressive career, and attained measurable success in the private sector on St. Thomas.

Reaping profit through smart work and sweat equity, Petrus has done a great job growing his company to a staff of over 100, and training them to effectively manage his business holdings while he serves as Governor of the U.S. Virgin Islands if he wins.

On February 17, Petrus announced his official Democratic Party bid and his selection of St. Croix Senator Sammuel Sanes, as his Lieutenant Governor running mate.

Early birds catch the worms. Petrus and Sanes are getting an early start to present their team's "All In," and positive message on a united front.

Petrus' selection of Senator Sanes is solid from the perspective that Sanes has never lost an election on St. Croix, for the Legislature of the U.S. Virgin Islands. He is a very likable guy who has proven he can get the job done for Crucian's, Puerto Rican's, Latino's, West Indians, and the continental population across the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Since Sanes graduated from Florida Memorial College, and returned to his native St. Croix, he has built bridges in the Legislature, and stayed under the radar. Overall, the team is one to watch, and Sanes is a 'Steady Eddy.'

A review of the 2014 Board of Elections results indicate nearly the same amount of Democratic candidates are running in the 2018 Primary election on August 4, which will be the first threshold the "#AllInWithPetrus," team must pass.

The best campaign teams know there is a winning formula that reflects strong strategies of how the candidates can build solidarity among the middle class and the economically disadvantaged, while maintaining support from the business class and financially privileged in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Middle Class Anxiety

Of the key areas, there are multiple sub areas that candidates should be attentive to, particularly because middle class anxiety looms large and could be the straw that breaks the camel's back when considering the future of the U.S. Virgin Islands. On the cusp of the Democratic Primary Election, and the first major and measurable threshold Democratic candidates must pass, the evidence is profound.

If each 2018 Democratic Primary candidate hasn't already asked and answered this question they must: How can the Democratic Party in the U.S. Virgin Islands that represents the teacher, farmer, laborer, physician, police officer, WAPA lineman, newspaper, radio, and TV employee, property owner, community and civic leader, middle managers, and other unnamed groups—not have met success in the 2014 General Election?

The 2014 Primary and General Election voting results suggests how deeply pervasive middle class anxiety is and has been for years, even decades, and the Issues heightening middle class anxiety make it so:

- Gun and drug violence, and residents afraid to go out because they don't want to get held up, shot, and even killed in some cases.
- Mental illness and depression already at near crisis proportions before Hurricanes Irma and Maria, and exacerbated with post-traumatic stress added in the aftermath of the Category 5 hurricanes, all in the absence of a mental health facility that can accommodate the needs of patients who require various levels and types of treatment.
- Senior citizens having to pick between paying their WAPA bill or paying for their high blood pressure and diabetes medication.
- No viable options for elderly care for the aging population, with over 50 percent of the population being over 50 years old. Many children are unable to care for parents because they live on the mainland and abroad, and have to work. The need for assisted care, home care, and nursing homes will increase exponentially in the next five to 10 years, yet nursing homes in the U.S. Virgin Islands are currently not Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services certified, and therefore, they are not eligible for Federal funding.
- The masses not having health insurance.
- Economic insecurity from month to month, and residents living below the poverty line.
- Job loss in the tourism industry, and other key areas in the aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and Maria; and an underdeveloped tourism product, with only two flagship hotels on St. Thomas, one on St. Croix, and an empty stadium in Frederiksted.
- A collapsed Government Employees Retirement System (GERS) and unfunded liability.
- Parents unable to fund college education.
- Limited use of vocational trades, and nonexistent jobs in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM).

Numbers do not lie. The Issues that lead to middle class anxiety have engulfed the territory for decades, and the vicious cycle must be broken. An injection of economic development and growth in the private sector will take the burden off the government and reduce its payroll.

One of many viable approaches include reviewing the [Fortune 100 Best Companies To Work For](#) list, determining what top companies are interested in moving their headquarters to the U.S. Virgin Islands, engaging and inviting a short list of candidates, discussing and negotiating mutually beneficial terms and their corporate responsibility, and wholly supporting their seamless entrance and sustainability in America's Paradise.

With a cradle to grave project plan, which includes a robust learning and development curriculum that trains government employees, they will shift off the government payroll to the private sector, where Fortune 100 Best Companies' salaries will be more competitive, and include a Total Rewards philosophy based on access to programs that can be tailored to meet the personal health and financial well-being needs of employees and their families, while providing resources and programs to help employees pursue their professional goals.

Attractive Great Place to Work Total Rewards Package

In addition to competitive Medical and Dental Plans, Flexible Spending Accounts, Short and Long Term Disability Plans, Supplemental Life Insurance, Accidental Death & Dismemberment Insurance, and a 401(k) Savings Plan, examples of an attractive Great Place to Work Total Rewards Package that should be negotiated between the government and Fortune 100 Best Companies before they legally establish in the U.S. Virgin Islands include:

- **Well-being Rewards Programs:** Financial incentives for employees who engage in healthy behaviors.
- **Employee Mortgage Program:** A home mortgage that can help with a new mortgage, refinancing an existing mortgage, and other home equity products.
- **Auto and Home Insurance Program:** Employee access to group auto loan and home insurance payable through easy and convenient payroll deductions.
- **Legal Plan:** Employees are eligible for easy and low cost access to a network of Virgin Islands Bar Association attorneys for a wide variety of personal legal services.
- **Smoking Cessation Program:** Face-to-face or telephonic counseling as well as prescription (with copay) and non-prescription drugs.
- **Personal and Family Sick Time:** Employee paid full salary when absent for the negotiated number of days or fewer consecutive days due to an illness, injury, or medical treatment, with sick time that can also be used to care for an immediate family member.
- **Parental Leave:** Primary care parents will receive a negotiated number of weeks in addition to maternity disability or paid adoption leave.
- **Adoption Leave:** Separate and apart from Parental Leave, and designed to assist new parents when adopting an eligible child or children by providing a negotiated amount of time off for the primary care parent.
- **New Mom's Lactation Program:** A discount on a breast pump, in addition to ongoing counseling and prenatal information, for all employees as well as their spouses and domestic partners.
- **Retirement Wealth Builder** (Separate and apart from the 401(k): A Retirement Plan fully funded by the employer based on job levels and years of service, where the employee is fully vested over a certain period of time.

The Great Place to Work Total Rewards components negotiated between the government and Fortune 100 Best Companies are what will ensure the transition of thousands of government employees off the government payroll and into the private sector, which will take the burden off government coffers. This won't happen overnight, but a detailed project plan, marketing plan, and phased approach gives the opportunity teeth.

Until that time, middle class anxiety is still the 500 pound elephant in the room that must be addressed by the Democratic Primary, and all candidates.

If the Democratic Party and its Primary candidates can't find a cure for middle class anxiety and communicate their short and long term plans before the Primary Election, and moving into the General Election on November 6, the Party may render itself obsolete, as the middle class sees no opportunity—only threat to their health, safety, security, and overall well-being.

