

A National Address By The Chairman Of The Virgin Islands Party: Hon. Julian Fraser RA

Wednesday November 12th 2014

Good evening fellow Virgin Islanders, Residents and everyone within the reach of this broadcast, both at home and abroad.

I am Julian Fraser, Chairman and Leader of the Virgin Islands Party.

I bring greetings from my wife Kharid and the rest of my family.

I also greet you on behalf of my fellow VIP's in the House of Assembly, and from the general membership of the Virgin Islands Party.

I am honored to serve as the 3rd Chairman of this great political Party.

And it is now my duty to continue the journey that was started by our Founding Chairman, the Late Hamilton Lavity Stoutt and kept alive by our immediate past Chairman Hon. Ralph T. O'Neal, OBE, who as you know has announced his retirement from active Politics.

I join the Territory in paying tribute to Hon. O'Neal for his invaluable contributions to the development of these Islands, and would also like to recognize his wife: Rev Edris O'Neal, for her unwavering support over his many years of service.

As Chairman, **it is important that** I share with you the Party's road map to objectives, that immediately started after our new Executive Committee was elected into office on May 28th.

The Executive has established a schedule of meetings to convene on each of the four main islands within each Electoral District, and are currently in progress.

This series of meetings, to which the press has also been invited, are not only intended for voters and residents to meet the newly elected Committee, but are primarily designed for us to listen to every voice within each of the communities.

And we encourage you to attend.

Additionally, it is also our goal that at the conclusion of these meetings, all our Party members through their District Committees would be well informed of the democratic process of selecting candidates to fill the 11 vacant seats on the VIP ticket to contest the next General Elections.

As Chairman, I listened and I have heard your cry. And may I assure you, that the VIP's message is a positive message of HOPE, built on a foundation of SUCCESS and DELIVERY over 43 years.

Each of us is called upon to do our part! It is not about anyone of us in our individual capacity! **It is about all of us!**

Our late Chief Minister and party founder Hamilton Lavity Stoutt, and the immediate past Chairman and Leader of the Opposition Hon. Ralph T. O'Neal OBE, were both giants of these Virgin Islands.

They lifted this Territory from the idea of being a bird sanctuary -- to new frontiers of education, offering scholarships to Virgin Islanders, and building a modern society.

Despite being common knowledge, at times it serves as a useful reminder to note, that the VIP started all major infrastructure developments in this country.

And these include: roads, schools, airports, bridges, potable water, clinics, electricity, ports development, telecommunications, financial services, community centers, progressive legislations, and tourism.

Thereby, lifting our people to affluence and prosperity and creating a harmonious society.

While history will confirm that the VIP built this country, we cannot forget the contributions of other great leaders such as: late Chief Minister Willard Wheatley - who took the Territory out of Grant-in-Aid; late Chief Minister Cyril B. Romney - father of our Financial Services Sector; and Conrad A. Maduro - for a working labor policy through his Labor Code.

Unfortunately however, within three short years the NDP has managed to destroy that rich legacy built by these great leaders.

Here we are at this late stage of this Administration, where the Virgin Islands are at the crossroads, where decisions made today will affect this territory for decades to come ... "My people", we cannot afford to get things wrong at this critical juncture in the development of our territory.

After three years of a National Democratic Party (NDP) Government led by Dr. the Honorable D. Orlando Smith, who has been telling you the economy is robust and that all is well.

I ask you the people, is that the case?

Today, record numbers of homes and vehicles are being repossessed. Parents have to work multiple jobs in order to provide for their families.

Since the NDP became the government, residents are having a hard time paying their mortgages. Most of our young people have no hope of affording their own home.

Our young people are facing a future of hardship. But the NDP continues to tell us the economy is booming, with resorts, hotels, and marinas, laying off scores of people each month, even as trust companies downsize and relocate.

The economy is not booming, when you visit places like the Stickett in Long Look, Scatliffe Alley in Road Town, parts of Purcell, Little Apple Bay, Baugher's Bay, Cane Garden Bay, Huntums Gut, Bell View and Parham Town.

For what will you discover? You will witness too many of our young people, without jobs or proper education, sitting around all day in hopeless despair.

This is very painful to me and is a social tragedy.

Add to this the fact, that too many of our youth leave colleges and universities each year and return home with no career prospects.

This is certainly not good for the country.

For an economy to prosper, it must above all else, possess a prosperous middle class, and it must provide a route for anyone to enter the middle class, in order to generate opportunities for everyone, not just the fortunate few!

Before I get into how the VIP will address these pressing matters including the economy, let me move to an area I call setting the record straight, and be forthright in making you the wiser.

The current NDP Government stated a gross untruth almost immediately upon winning the elections of 2011, with propaganda that the Virgin Islands Party left the country broke.

In fact, it has become crystal clear that this was a gross fabrication from the analysis, and from thorough assessment of the matter.

As a matter of fact, it has been confirmed that between November 7th 2011 the date upon which the NDP took office, and the end of year December 31st 2011, that within that short 7 weeks the NDP collected \$53 million from the Financial Services Commission alone.

But not only that, the NDP was the beneficiary of another \$22 million from additional sources during that same time period. In short, the NDP inherited \$75 million from the outgoing Virgin Islands Party Government in 2011.

Bear in mind that this financial information came from the Premier and Minister of Finance himself.

The very healthy financial state in which the VIP left the country was revealed by the Premier, during the Questions and Answers period of the 7th Sitting of the 3rd Session of the 2nd House of Assembly on June 13th 2014.

So not only was this a gross fabrication, but the NDP deceived you the taxpaying public, the NDP was less than forthright to you about the state of the country's finances.

Now even the Minister for Health himself, a man with some proficiency in financial matters, has stated repeatedly, that government requires \$20 million in cash each month to operate.

So taking 3/4 of November 2011 and all of December 2011 that amounts to \$35 million, and taking the same NDP's claim that the VIP left a \$30 million debt into consideration, which makes a total of \$65 million in **debt and expenses**, I ask this question?

Mr. Premier, you paid the \$65 million in commitments, and you were left with \$10 million. So, where did \$10 million disappear to?

That is an unanswered question!

As we prepare, and move towards the next General Election, the VIP is called upon to restore this country once more. **And we will.**

The VIP is the one Party that can save the Territory from the threat of pending fiscal and social disaster.

The VIP will stimulate the economy, by spending on specific aspects of national development that promotes both economic and job growth.

The VIP will marry national development to social cohesiveness. The Party will ensure development meets the required social and environmental parameters.

And the VIP will use development to stimulate a slow and ever contracting economy.

And yes there is more. The VIP will establish good and mutually beneficial relations with our Caribbean neighbors, particularly the USVI.

The VIP will restore the respect and good reputation of the Virgin Islands on the International stage.

Under my leadership, I will ensure that at every Heads of Governments meeting convened by the OECS or CARICOM, the Virgin Islands will be represented by either the Premier or the Deputy Premier.

To do otherwise is not an option.

The VIP will with urgency, begin to reorganize the education system to ensure that Virgin Islanders are capable of managing the maritime and yachting industries, in partnership with investors and stakeholders.

This will entail the establishment of a Maritime and Oceanographic Sciences Curriculum, together with a supporting Maritime Academy, where Virgin Islanders will be trained full time, in all aspects of the maritime industry.

The academy, will be a place of learning, both academic and vocational, and it will introduce a new maritime culture into the country's body politic.

We were once a people of a maritime culture! Wouldn't it be nice then to have that restored?

The academy will promote conservation and sustainability, and help to protect the marine environment by building geography and ecology, into all aspects of a new national maritime curriculum.

The academy will also work with the US Coast Guard, The Royal Navy, Shipping Registry, VISAR, and the Royal Virgin Islands Police Force, to train its cadets, in all aspects of maritime security.

The academy will ensure, that the next generation of Virgin Islanders, is instructed in essential maritime skills.

This academy has always been something I felt strongly about for this country. I will fight with all I have to get it established as Premier. My aim is to cooperate with any and all relevant interests; the objective of course is to find mutual footing.

The national maritime program will become a most vital project for a VIP Government.

The Maritime Academy with associated programs, will ensure the employment of future generations in an industry that is vital to the country's bottom line, both socially and economically.

All stakeholders, local and foreign, will be expected to contribute to this project, which will build economic growth, and equip our people, for the years ahead.

The VIP will build a new junior high school to address overcrowding, indiscipline, and other issues that impact the education system.

Deviancy has become a cancer in the Virgin Islands education system, severely degrading the education product.

The VIP will focus on rebuilding the deteriorating schools' infrastructure first, rather than embarking on any type of pie-in-the-sky projects or programs.

The lack of proper prioritizing appears to be the norm of an overly politicized Ministry of Education.

The NDP's mistaken policy of cutbacks on scholarships and opportunities, has resulted in students being unable to afford the education that they need.

The reality is that college tuition has tripled in the UK, and has significantly increased in the US.

Today, parents watch the dreams they have for their children evaporate into thin air under this NDP Administration.

The VIP will introduce a new regime of teacher assessment and training, that will be ongoing and vigorous, a regime that will ensure that every teacher is fully equipped for the classroom.

The critical importance of education means that the Premier's Office will monitor closely the activities of the Ministry of Education, and work with the Education Minister, to ensure that the VIP's policy for education is effectively implemented.

Education is not a political football. The future of the territory depends on its education model.

The VIP will seek to create a food sufficient economy, through a new model of agriculture that builds incentives and efficiencies into the system.

Agriculture in the Virgin Islands is an industry that has not been leveraged effectively over the years.

It is an industry capable of creating new businesses, and that will generate employment opportunities for our people.

It is also an industry that can promote better health and wellness. Agriculture is critical to our national security and a strong economy.

The VIP will diversify the financial services sector, and ensure that locals are trained at all levels of this vital Industry.

The Virgin Islands Party will develop the education system, to ensure Virgin Islanders are capable of performing effectively in the strategic management of our financial services business.

This is an area where government must use its influence and resources, both financial and diplomatic, to forge partnerships with the private sector in order to build our human capital in the industry.

The days when locals were met with obstacles in their advancement in this vital industry should be made a thing of the past.

The VIP will build trade links and alliances with other countries, which will promote mutually beneficial partnerships.

We will build the economy from the bottom up, by investing in both the social and economic infrastructure.

The Party will ensure the independence of the Public Service.

A VIP Administration will also strengthen and empower the Private Sector, as this is critical to the development and growth of the economy.

This will be done by encouraging and fostering entrepreneurship, primarily through easier access to trade licenses, and where possible, lifting the burden of unnecessary regulations.

Yes Ladies and gentlemen, the VIP has a different vision for the Virgin Islands

The VIP believes in investing in people, all the people, not just the one percent (1%) at the top of the pile.

The VIP will reverse the bad economic policies of the NDP, especially taxes on small businesses.

We will reduce tax costs on specific products that benefit the people, and help to build economic growth.

The VIP will revisit the increased work permit fees that hurt small businesses, as they often times pay these fees for employees as part of their package.

We will reduce the higher taxes at every port that deter small businesses from trading freely with our neighboring Islands.

The VIP will undo the damage the NDP has done to the financial services sector, causing the flight of foreign investment from our shores. The VIP will ensure that the scourge of Blacklisting is avoided, including the removal of the Virgin Islands from France's current Blacklist.

But there is much more

The VIP will stimulate a slow Virgin Islands' economy.

It will do this by sticking within specific parameters as follows:

1. All public investment must impact medium and long-term economic growth positively,
2. All public investment must promote job growth through economic diversification,
3. All public investment must impact positively, to bring about a sustainable and environmentally friendly economic model,
4. All public investment must promote public safety and national security,
5. All public investment must build a socially cohesive community,
6. All public investment, must be fully assessed in a transparent and public setting before adoption, and
7. All public investment must fit into a long term strategic plan for the country, which builds a new economic model that places the Virgin Islander at the center of all public policy.

Additionally, with all these policies, we should never forget the critical issues of airlift, and inter-island sea transportation that also takes into account the greater Virgin Islands.

My people, the VIP will work diligently to produce a policy that will give every young Virgin Islander, ***just starting out in life and in the world of employment***, the opportunity to own a home.

My colleagues and I will work hard on a policy that will do just that.

It's a policy that will open the door to home ownership for all Virgin Islanders and Belongers, to own their first home.

More about this home ownership plan will be forthcoming.

The VIP has solid solutions for the Virgin Islands, solutions that mean that every Virgin Islander and resident will be included in the future of this country.

When you have a stake in the place you call home, you will care about it more. Under a Fraser Administration, no one will be left out.

Virgin Islanders and residents, men and women who has to work for a living, men and women who own small businesses, or work for small businesses, and all who have to struggle each day just to survive.

From the janitor to the school teacher, and from the shop floor assistant to the civil engineer, you are all faced with the realities of a staggering economy.

As Chairman, the Virgin Islands Party will continue to develop solutions for improving the economy and building HOPE for our people!

The Virgin Islands Party is a party of inclusion.

Your thoughts and ideas are all welcomed.

When the 11 Candidates are elected by the Congress of the Party, we will review any and all suggestions made, and where appropriate, incorporate these into our Manifesto for a once again upward mobile Virgin Islands.

We have already established timelines for the announcements of candidates to run on the Party ticket for the upcoming general election, so therefore, in line with the Party constitution, I will dispatch instructions to have the Nominating Committee meet with the nine District Committees to start the process.

The VIP has always been the party of the people, the party to put the Virgin Islands and its people first.

And that great vision of a prosperous Virgin Islands, with a happy and contented people, will once again be achieved, under the next VIP Government.

I thank you for your time, God bless you, and God bless these Beautiful Virgin Islands