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## V.I. Conservation District Board Struggles with Insufficient Membership

**Despite enthusiasm from new members, Conservation District unable to proceed without quorum**

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**Sun rising on St. Croix's East End (Point Udall). By. V.I. CONSORTIUM**

Despite support from the Committee on Rules and Judiciary for two individuals nominated to serve on the V.I. Conservation District Board, the entity falls woefully short of the 11-member total required by law. Even after the full body seconds the nominations of Nathaniel Olive and Carlos Robles, the board will only have a complement of 5 members.

The continued absence of a quorum means that the board, despite its new members, will be unable to take any official actions. The V.I. Conservation District Board, legally responsible under VI

Code for the conservation and development of soil, water and related resources as well as proper land use, has remained relatively defunct for decades.

Mr. Robles, a former commissioner of the Department of Agriculture, told lawmakers that the board will need a 6th individual to achieve a quorum so that it could “begin establishing the goals and objectives for the conservation district.” Compounding the issue, the terms of 2 of the 3 members appointed to the board several years ago are quickly coming to an end.

Nonetheless, Mr. Robles was pleased that the territory was “now on the road to resurrecting this valuable resource.” To further bolster the board’s ability to do its work, he asked legislators to consider appropriating \$40,000 to \$45,000 for “inter-island and national travel and part-time secretarial services.” Sen. Carla Joseph was a proponent of providing seed funding that they can eventually “make grow.”

Dr. Nathaniel Olive, the second nominee, was equally as excited to serve as Mr. Robles. His experience includes leading conservation projects and running the USVI’s only certified organic farm in northwestern St. Croix. In his testimony, he told committee members that he looks forward to joining the Conversation District board “to further protect and benefit our precious natural and cultural resources through productive conservation initiatives and policy recommendations to relevant agencies.”

According to Dr. Olive, the territory can tap into “pools of existing funding nationally reserved for conservation districts.” Despite the current absence of a quorum, he affirmed that he was looking forward to “intertwining conservation efforts with recently approved positive initiatives” including the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan. He anticipates that a re-energized Virgin Islands Conservation District board will promote a “healthy and ecologically productive environment, while at the same time preserving the unique cultural heritage of the Virgin Islands.”

Members of the Committee on Rules and Judiciary were in full support of the governor’s nominees and voted unanimously in their favor. They also voted through three leases and four pending bills. Among them was [Bill 35-0077](#), a lease agreement between the Government of the Virgin Islands and St. Thomas Rescue to operate a long-term headquarters. Senators also supported Bills 35-0211 and 35-0225, both leasing [government-owned property](#) for crop production and heritage education respectively.

Senator Donna Frett-Gregory’s [Bill 35-0133](#) which seeks to create scholarship opportunities for students interested in a maritime career will also proceed to the full body for further consideration, as will Bill [35-0172](#), which pertains to building codes. Another bill sponsored by Ms. Frett-Gregory, [Bill 35-0182](#), will offer protection and justice to victims whose sexually explicit images are circulated without their permission. It too will be discussed in the next full body session. Finally, [Bill 35-0218](#), relating to new guidelines for unemployment benefits, also received the backing of the Committee on Rules and Judiciary.