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Opinion | The Reapportionment Initiative Is Flawed. It's Time We Grow Up And Write A Constitution.

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NOTE: This article is written in my capacity as a concerned citizen and not as a member or representative of any of the many organizations of which I am a member, including the League of Women Voters. I alone am responsible for the ideas stated. - Gwen-Marie Moolenaar

The Reapportionment Initiative has spawned serious thought and lively discussion among Virgin Islanders about how we shall govern ourselves. I thank the St. Croix Government Retirees, Inc., (SCGR) for initiating and shepherding the effort. In this article I pose four questions to help guide decisions on the vote.

First, what are the goals of the Initiative? The answer most often heard is to increase accountability. One has to ask, then, what is the evidence that accountability is flawed and needs

improvement? The opposite, however, can be shown: St. Croix, for example, has very little fear in sweeping the legislature when voters are dissatisfied. The last general election is a fine example. Recently on St. Thomas, voters showed dissatisfaction when a senator made a regrettable comment about his salary. Gone! On St. Croix a few years ago a senator made a similar comment about a need for higher salary to buy more impressive suits. Gone! There are many other examples of voters holding senators accountable by their vote. We may need to further encourage voters, though, to hold our representatives to even higher standards of performance. We have an accountability measure and we do use it when we feel the need to: it's our vote.

The Initiative further purports that increasing the number of districts will improve accountability. This is not convincing by what is proposed, however. For example, the Initiative proposes to increase the number of districts from 2 to 5 with each having 2 representatives (St. John with one). Wouldn't accountability be better achieved with 4 districts per island (St. John with one or part of one) and each having one representative per district? The one man one vote model is the highest electoral form for accountability. It's not proposed in this Initiative, though.

Second, is the question of form and function. Function depends on form and form informs function. In other words, form and function are closely linked. When asked about how the new structure will function, the response has been that we will work it out later; that "we must crawl before we walk". Well, that may be true for toddlers but we are talking about our government. Why should we vote for a structure when we don't know how it will work? Should not position papers have been developed following serious discussion on issues of function?

Third, who will work out the details afterward and when. Will it be a special commission or the Legislature or SCGR or the Election System? And how soon after will it occur?

This is like being asked to pack your suitcase but not know where you are going. When you do that, you won't know if the things in your suitcase are suitable for the end site. Locally, it's like "buying cat in bag".

My fourth and final question is this: Can we not at last GROW UP and elect some reasonable adults to write a constitution within which to frame how we will govern ourselves? Or can we not adopt and adapt the Organic Act as our constitution and then determine the structure of our legislature within that context?

The U.S. Constitutional Convention was one in which people worked together to hammer out goals which then guided ways of achieving the goals. This Initiative is a piecemeal effort toward what we really need, a constitution. A constitution will then be the roadmap within which to make changes in our government. Think about it or we could end up in a place we might not like. Again, I compliment SCGR for beginning the discussion and for their tireless efforts in moving it forward.