

Opinion: It's Time for an Ethics Commission in the U.S. Virgin Islands

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Certainly feels like déjà vu all over again. Virgin Islanders awoke on Wednesday to read headlines detailing the awarding of a lucrative no-bid contract to a friend/ relative of the Governor. People scratched their heads and asked what had happened to the change they had been promised and had voted for. Was it nepotism? The facts are not yet fully known and therefore it may be too soon to label it as such.

The League of Women Voters of the Virgin Islands (LWV Vi) acknowledges that in a community as small as ours, it is understandable that administrators might find it necessary on occasion to appoint relatives/friends to high positions or award contracts to them. However, we would assume that such appointments or awards had been made, as all others, on a competitive basis using specific metrics that demonstrate unequivocally that the talents and experience / expertise of

the relative/friend rose above all others applying for the award or appointment. Failing that, it sure would smell like nepotism. Giving the young a chance is unquestionably a worthy goal but, again, the award must still be able to pass the smell test of nepotism.

Many mainland states have laws to prevent nepotism from occurring, while other states have conflict of interest laws that prohibit nepotism or do so through the creation of ethics commissions.

It is clear that this is long overdue for the USVI. The LWV VI has written to the senators in the 33rd Legislature urging them to enact legislation on nepotism, as most states have done. The LWV VI was heartened by the questions raised by some members of the Legislature's Finance Committee during a budget hearing over the administration's awarding of a lucrative contract to a friend/relative. It may have been completely justified or it may be nepotism. One thing is clear, however: it is time to put a stop to questionable as well as patently unethical actions by enacting laws that specifically address nepotism in no uncertain terms, along with the consequences for its violation.

Submitted Friday by the V.I. League of Women Voters.

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