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Ida Smith's Congressional Candidacy Restored by Board of Elections After Contentious Meeting

A heated debate ensued as Elections Supervisor Fawkes defied Attorney General's opinion, but the Board voted 9-4 to approve Smith's candidacy for the November congressional election

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Delegate to Congress Candidate Ida Smith. By. CREDIT: WTJX

The V.I. Board of Elections during a Wednesday meeting voted in favor of Ida Smith's eligibility to appear on the ballot as a candidate for Delegate to Congress, rejecting an earlier disqualification by Elections Supervisor Caroline Fawkes.

During the meeting, the board voted in favor of Smith's candidacy following a contentious debate, culminating in a 9-4 decision to uphold the opinion of the territory's attorney general, who earlier

opined that Ms. Smith is qualified to be on the ballot.

The matter stemmed from an initial determination by Ms. Fawkes, who cited several issues with Ms. Smith's voter registration and residency, leading to her disqualification. Despite this, Attorney General nominee Gordon Rhea issued a legal opinion affirming Ms. Smith's eligibility, stating that neither Title 48 of the United States Code nor the House Qualifications Clause in Article 1 of the Constitution barred her from appearing on the ballot. In a letter to Board Chair Alecia Wells, Mr. Rhea clarified that the only qualifications that need to be met for the Congressional seat at the time of swearing in are age and citizenship, effectively clearing Smith's path to the ballot.

At Wednesday's meeting, board members initially entered a 40-minute executive session to discuss legal matters before resuming their discussion with Ms. Fawkes. Although Mr. Rhea's opinion supported Ms. Smith's candidacy, Ms. Fawkes maintained that unresolved defects in the candidacy package still rendered Ms. Smith ineligible.

As the debate intensified, board member Raymond Williams moved to close further discussion, a motion that passed 9-2. Board member Kareem Francis then motioned to uphold the disqualification, but the board rejected this motion with a 7-5 vote. Finally, a third motion was put forward by board member Epiphane Joseph, who moved to accept the attorney general's opinion and allow Ms. Smith on the November 5, general election ballot. This motion passed 7-4.

Tensions remained high as Mr. Joseph further called for Ms. Fawkes' resignation over her handling of the matter, but this proposal failed after no one seconded the motion. With that development, Ms. Fawkes asked to make a comment for the record. "I disagree with the Attorney General's opinion," she stated. "I will not put Ms. Smith on the ballot, so we'll go to court." Mr. Williams immediately countered with another motion, this time calling for the Board itself to vote that Ms. Smith's name be included as a candidate to the Office of Delegate on November's ballot. His proposal passed with 9 board members in favor.