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DeGraff is Lone Vote Against Rhea's AG Nomination Amid Strong Senate Endorsement

DeGraff stands alone in opposition, citing personal pride, even as Rhea clarified that he has never worked for or met Epstein, while colleagues praise Rhea's qualifications and ethics in confirmation vote

Senate / **Published On September 28, 2024 07:26 AM /**

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Senate-confirmed AG Nominee Gordon Rhea, left, greets Senator Dwayne DeGraff during regular session on Friday, Sept. 27, 2024. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

Senator Dwayne DeGraff was the lone holdout amidst a wave of support for the nomination of Gordon Rhea as Attorney General of the Virgin Islands when the 35th Legislature met in regular session on Friday.

Mr. Rhea, [nominated by Governor Albert Bryan Jr](#) in April, received the full support of the Committee on Rules and Judiciary when he appeared before them to defend his suitability for the role. On Friday, Senator Marise James expressed that “attorney Gordon Rhea is unmatched in so many different areas,” while Senator Milton Potter remarked that the “depth and breadth of his knowledge and experience make him a valuable asset in this very important position.”?

Mr. DeGraff, however, told the nominee that he could not support him because he had “defended an individual that was a cohort of Jeffrey Epstein.” During his appearance before the [Committee on Rules and Judiciary](#), Mr. Rhea testified that he had previously served as local counsel for Richard Khan, who worked as Epstein’s accountant and was one of two co-executors of his estate. “I have never met, communicated with or represented Mr. Epstein, and I am as shocked and disgusted by his conduct as I believe we all are,” said Mr. Rhea during that meeting.

He told lawmakers then, that he had taken the liberty of recusing himself from matters that could ultimately become conflicts of interest, including matters relating to a [lawsuit settled last year](#) by banking giant JP Morgan, linked to Jeffrey Epstein’s crimes in the territory.

?Unlike those of his colleagues who were satisfied with that response, Mr. DeGraff was unmoved. “I don't support based on that, that's my own pride. I'm not perfect. I have my faults,” he said during his allocated time to comment on the batch of nominations up for final approval from the Legislature. “In terms of his qualifications, he's qualified, but I don't support his nomination for that position of attorney general at this time,” he emphasized.

?Despite Mr. DeGraff’s ultimate vote against Mr. Rhea’s confirmation as attorney general, his nomination was supported by the thirteen other lawmakers present during the session. “The solemn promise that I can make to you is that I will not let you down,” said Mr. Rhea when invited to make brief remarks following the overwhelmingly positive vote. “I will act in an ethical and honest manner,” he pledged.

Lawmakers also supported the nomination of Julian Penn for the Virgin Islands Taxi Commission for the district of St. Thomas, despite [initial reservations](#) that he may be unqualified. “I rarely ever shift my vote,” said Senator Angel Bolques Jr. who, while initially skeptical, decided to support Mr. Penn after witnessing his “passion and...vigor” and listening to varying perspectives. “I will take particular interest in watching what he does with the Taxi Cab Commission.”

Mr. Rhea’s and Mr. Penn’s affirmative nominations were two of many bills passed during Friday’s legislative session. Lawmakers also voted through several rezoning requests, all previously vetted in the Committee on Rules and Judiciary.?

Finally, senators completed the final legislative step to approve the budget bills for fiscal year 2024/2025. With only three days until the start of the new financial year on October 1, they now await the governor’s stamp of approval.