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36th V.I. Legislature Sworn In, Leaders Commit to Addressing Pressing Challenges Facing Territory

During the ceremony in Emancipation Garden, Senate President Milton Potter and other senators called for collaborative governance, impartiality, and solutions to issues such as infrastructure, public services, and economic growth

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Senators Novelle Francis, Milton Potter, Kenneth Gittens, Avery Lewis, Kurt Vialet, and others attended the 36th Legislature's swearing-in ceremony on Monday, January 13, 2025 in St. Thomas, USVI. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

The fifteen men and women who were elected to the V.I. Legislature in the November 5th general election were officially sworn in as senators during a ceremony at Emancipation Garden in

Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, on Monday morning.

Simultaneously taking the oath of office administered by Chief Justice Rhys Hodge, senators from both districts affirmed their commitment to making and amending laws in a way that best suits the interests and needs of the people of the Virgin Islands. The brief ceremony, marked by several musical and literary performances, preceded the first sitting of the 36th Legislature in the Earl B. Ottley Legislative Chamber in St. Thomas. There, Senator Milton Potter officially assumed the presidency of the 36th Legislature, receiving the mallet from his predecessor, Senator Novelle Francis Jr.

“It is really humbling to have been given the vote of confidence by my colleagues to serve as the leader of this institution,” said Mr. Potter in the first remarks of his new role. “We stand on the threshold of a new chapter in the vibrant history of the United States Virgin Islands,” he declared. “As we embark on this journey, let us remember that our primary duty is to listen to our constituents, to listen to each other, to advocate for the needs of the people of the territory, the aspirations and their well-being,” was his appeal to his colleagues.

“The challenges ahead for this territory may be formidable, but they are not insurmountable. With the strength and shared commitment to innovative ideas and collaborative spirit, we can work towards finding solutions,” said the new Senate president.

His colleague, Senator Alma Francis Heyliger is also interested in working collaboratively – albeit with one caveat. “Our goal has to be that we put the priorities of the people of this territory first and foremost,” she reminded her fellow lawmakers. “Our word of the year should be impartial,” she suggested. “I want to make sure that we are fair across the board. I would like to be a member of this institution where we all have an opportunity for our voices to be heard.”

“You can count on me to be fair and impartial,” replied Senator Potter.

Others, including freshman Senator Clifford Joseph, signaled their commitment to working together for the benefit of Virgin Islanders. “I’m willing to help restore these islands to what we knew and look for greater things in the future,” he stated. “Clifford Joseph is not in need of nothing, so there is no reason for me to go wayward,” he said, presumably addressing the listening and viewing public.

“I want this 36th Legislature to be one in which we will work together to move the Virgin Islands forward,” said Senator Kurt Vialet, maintaining the established refrain. “I also want us to not take discussions, arguments and topics personally...It is okay to oppose your friend’s bill. Opposition makes legislation better. You cannot be thin-skinned and serve in this body,” advised Mr. Vialet, who returns to the legislature following [an unsuccessful gubernatorial bid](#) in 2022.

The St. Croix senator reminded his colleagues that despite having to contend with “so many pressing issues,” “we don’t really have the luxury of time.” Mr. Vialet suggested that they all work toward resolving issues “until we are able to see some movement.”

Freshman Senator Avery Lewis also got his chance to address the chamber. “We come to bring solutions and answer the cry of the people to make life easier for the people of the Virgin Islands,” said the former St. Thomas administrator. “We got all kinds of problems: street lights, sewage, everything. I plan to bring solutions to make life easier.” Mr. Lewis made specific mention of his impartiality, stressing that “Albert Bryan did not send Avery Lewis here. I come as a public servant to represent the people of the Virgin Islands.”

A second, commemorative, ceremony will take place on St. Croix on Wednesday, January 15th, offering residents in that district to participate in the swearing in activities.

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