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Angel Bolques Censured and Suspended Without Pay After Ethics Probe Into Harassment Allegations

Legislature adopts Senator Kenneth Gittens' amendment in 7–6 vote, approving 30-day suspension without pay for Senator Angel Bolques Jr., with 15 days held in abeyance, and a formal letter of reprimand.

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Senator Angel Bolues Jr. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE.

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Senator Angel Bolues Jr. has been censured by his colleagues for “violating the code of ethical conduct of the 36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands.” The lawmaker has been

under investigation after a female staffer complained about sexual harassment and a hostile work environment.

It was nearing the end of Thursday's legislative session and Committee of the Whole meeting when Senator Kurt Vialet stood to special order the sanctions measure to the floor, without any debate time. The request was given Bill No. 36-0131, and after a short recess, lawmakers reconvened to consider the proposal.

Senator Kenneth Gittens then stood to offer an amendment to the sanctions measure. Because the original text of Bill 36-0131 was not made available to the public ahead of the legislative session, the Consortium was not able to compare Senator Gittens' changes to the baseline measure. Nevertheless, the amendment called for Senator Bolques's suspension without pay for 30 working days, along with a letter of reprimand.

The suspension will begin on August 18, next Monday, but 15 of those 30 days would be held in abeyance, according to the amendment, meaning the remaining days would be set aside and not immediately enforced unless future violations occur. Bolques would be bound to comply with all the rules of the 36th Legislature until the end of the year, failing which he would have to serve the remaining days of suspension.

Gittens reminded his colleagues that the Committee on Ethical Conduct had entered into a no contest agreement with Bolques and submitted its recommendation to the full body. "After caucusing, this is the amendment we came up with," he noted.

Senator Carla Joseph argued that the amendment had not been circulated to lawmakers according to current legislative rules, however legal counsel noted that since the sanctions proposal had been special ordered that same day, the amendment could not possibly have been circulated 24 hours before the session.

Members then voted 7–6 in favor of adopting Senator Gittens' amendment. That amendment called for Senator Bolques's suspension without pay for 30 working days, with 15 days held in abeyance, along with a letter of reprimand.

Once amended, the sanctions resolution returned to the floor for a final vote. This time, the amended measure passed on a vote of 7 in favor and 6 against. Senators Dwayne De Graff, Novelle Francis Jr., Alma Francis Heyliger, Kenneth Gittens, Franklin Johnson, and Kurt Vialet voted in favor, while Senators Marvin Blyden, Ray Fonseca, Hubert Frederick, Carla Joseph, Avery Lewis, and Senator Bolques himself voted against. Senators Marise James and Clifford Joseph were absent.

Senate President Milton Potter denied Senator Joseph the opportunity to rise on a point of personal privilege after the vote, deciding instead to adjourn the day's proceedings.

Mr. Bolques was first seated as a senator during the 34th Legislature, following the removal of former Senator Steven Payne, which stemmed from a sexual harassment complaint filed by a staffer, originally reported by the Consortium, and a subsequent series of investigative reports by this publication.