

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Senate Halts Bill Allowing Government Employees to Seek Office; Frederick Sends Marine Safety Measure Back to Committee

Lawmakers voted to hold a bill allowing gov't employees to seek public office, narrowly split over the measure, while Sen. Hubert Frederick asked that his marine safety bill be returned to Rules for further discussion amid broader debate on multiple bills

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Sen. Marise James, sponsor of the government-employee candidacy bill, speaks during Monday's Legislative Session as lawmakers voted to hold the measure for further review. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE.

Despite their previous vetting in their relevant committees of jurisdiction and the Committee on Rules and Judiciary, several bills again came under heavy scrutiny during Monday's Legislative Session.

Among them was Bill 36-0134, an act which would allow government employees to run for political office while actively employed, unless specifically prohibited by federal or other laws. Sponsored by Senator Marise James, the bill was placed under the microscope less than a week ago, with some lawmakers still hesitant about moving forward with the change.

Despite an additional amendment to require that government employees provide written notice of their candidacy to the head of their department or agency, a motion was made to hold the bill. Lawmakers were deeply divided on the question, with only 1 vote separating the votes in favor from those against. With the bill now held in abeyance, further amendments are expected whenever the measure returns to the Legislative floor.

Lawmakers also considered Bill 36-0208, a resolution recognizing United States Senator Mike Crapo for his instrumental role in securing the historic increase in the rum cover over tax reimbursement for the Virgin Islands. Senators Alma Francis Heyliger and Dwayne DeGraff held differing opinions from their colleagues who sang high praises of Sen. Crapo.

While grateful for Mr. Crapo's support, Sen. DeGraff stated, "I don't see the need for me to support an elected official who is doing his job." He seemed unsure of going the "resolution route" as well. Sen. DeGraff, like Sen. Francis Heyliger, felt that the individuals on the ground who helped secure the rum cover over rate should also be recognized.

Senator Angel Bolques, however, noted that it is Sen. Crapo's "right as a sitting senator to support whatever bill comes across his desk." Senator Marise James, too, felt that "you should always thank people for assisting you" with what she called "difficult" tasks. The bill received 13 yes votes.

Also up for consideration was Bill 36-0092, an Act approving the lease agreement between the Government of the Virgin Islands and St. John Taxi Services Corporation, for Parcel No. D-2

Estate Cruz Bay Town, Cruz Bay Quarter, St. John. Sen. DeGraff felt that the bill was "overreaching." He noted that since there is only one taxi stand on the island, granting a lease to "one entity" presents an issue for him.

Senators Alma Francis Heyliger, Franklin Johnson, and Ray Fonseca joined Senator DeGraff in voting against the bill. Senator Carla Joseph did not vote.

Lawmakers also considered the special ordering of Bill 36-0222, an act designating January 27, 2026, as St. John Legendary Rhythm and Blues Cruise Day and appropriating \$50,000 from the Tourism Revolving Fund to the Department of Tourism to organize and host festivities in celebration of St. John Legendary Rhythm and Blues Cruise Day. An amendment to the bill decreased the funding amount to \$35,000.

That bill received unanimous support. At-large Senator Bolques considered it an “opportunity to promote our culture, our heritage, our music, our entertainment, our food, to new individuals who are visiting the territory.” Senator Carla Joseph anticipates that it will bring “economic relief” to St. John, particularly those involved in hospitality.

Also special ordered was Bill 36-0223, a resolution honoring and commending the life legacy and service of former Warden Thomas Martin posthumously for his distinguished public service to the people of the Virgin Islands, his honorable military service as a Montford Point Marine during World War II and his posthumous receipt of the Congressional Gold Medal. It received overwhelming support.

Excluded from the votes was Bill 36-0209, an act amending title 23 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 10 to establish civil penalties for disregarding marine advisories and to create the Territorial Marine Safety Fund. Its sponsor, Senator Hubert Frederick, requested that it be sent back to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary for further discussion.

Earlier, Senator Marise James poked holes in the proposed legislation. “Agencies cannot execute and the judicial branch cannot interpret when we pass laws that are...flawed,” she warned.

It is now Governor Albert Bryan Jr.’s task to act on the aforementioned bills as well as the others [vetted](#) on Monday evening.