

Second Board of Elections Meeting Ends Abruptly After Quorum Breaks During Candidate Filing Review

The Board gave James Weber three days to cure a wrong-district filing, upheld Derreck Bermudez's disqualification for not being registered in the territory and Jed John Hope's for insufficient signatures, then lost quorum before an Ida Smith vote.

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For the second consecutive meeting, the Board of Elections was unable to complete its business after quorum broke during discussion of candidate filing and disqualification matters.

Board members first convened Friday to discuss the disqualification of several aspirants to office over non-compliance with filing deadlines and statutory requirements. After an executive session lasting roughly 40 minutes, members had just begun discussing the first appeal before them when

board member Harriet Mercer pointed out that quorum had been broken.

The board decided at that time to resume the meeting Monday morning. During the second attempt, members were able to take several votes before the meeting again came to an abrupt end.

James Weber, who is seeking office as Delegate to Congress, will be given three days to cure his nomination submission. Mr. Weber had been disqualified after officials determined that his paperwork had been filed in the wrong district.

Board member Cleopatra Peter cited local law, V.I. Code tit. 18, § 411 (2019), which says defects in nomination petitions, nomination papers or nomination certificates should be communicated to candidates and that they should be given an opportunity to correct them.

“We’re spending hours and hours and days wasting taxpayers’ money for something that should be remedied...in three days,” Ms. Peter declared.

Following a vote in support of her position, Mr. Weber will now have the opportunity to refile his paperwork on St. Croix to ensure that his candidacy is accepted.

Supervisor of Elections Caroline Fawkes then reiterated her earlier findings regarding Derreck Bermudez, who sought to run as lieutenant governor with Stephen Frett at the top of the ticket.

“He is not registered in the territory,” Ms. Fawkes told board members, adding that “presently he is wearing an ankle bracelet.”

His disqualification invalidates the entire ticket, Mr. Williams said, pointing out that gubernatorial aspirants run as a package. “You come in on May 19 and you do not have a qualified team, you’re disqualified,” Ms. Fawkes agreed, advising future aspirants to “screen your teammates.”

Regarding the candidacy of Jed JohnHope, Ms. Fawkes told board members that his nomination package was far short of the required number of signatures.

“On May 19 nomination deadline, he returned the papers to the St. Croix office with 25 signatures on the St. Thomas-St. John district, and three signatures from the St. Croix district,” she said.

Election law requires signatures from at least 100 qualified electors for each district. Ms. Fawkes said Mr. John Hope’s deficiency could not be cured.

“When you have an issue such as that, there’s no curing mechanism,” she said.

Curing, she suggested, would be possible in situations where “maybe the person forgot to sign or they sign in the wrong place, or they drop the signature, etc.” However, where there is no indication that a sufficient number of nominations was collected, Ms. Fawkes said “there is nothing to be cured.”

She also noted that Attorney General Gordon Rhea issued a legal opinion supporting her decision to disqualify Mr. John Hope on those grounds.

Board members decided that aspirants whose disqualifications were upheld will receive formal notification from the board. Those given an opportunity to cure defects will also receive official correspondence.

Board member Barbara LaRonde then moved “to instruct Supervisor Caroline Fawkes to withdraw her demands on Ida Smith to prove her residency,” pursuant to an opinion from the Attorney General on the matter.

Before that motion could be put to a vote, however, quorum was broken by the departure of two board members — Liliana Belardo O’Neal and John Baptiste — bringing the second attempt at an emergency meeting to an abrupt close.

There was no indication when the board intends to reconvene.

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