

Image not found or type unknown

St. Croix Democratic Senate Candidates Debate Costs, Healthcare, Crime, Education and Economic Growth

Democratic Senate candidates for St. Croix debated household costs, hospital finances, education, crime, brain drain and economic diversification, with views ranging from price-gouging enforcement and hospital donations to agriculture and energy reform.

Election / **Published On July 08, 2026 07:04 AM /**

Janeke Simon **July 08, 2026**

Image not found or type unknown



Democratic Senate candidates for St. Croix participate in the party's official debate, where affordability, healthcare, crime, education, brain drain and economic development were among the major issues discussed. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM.

Democratic Party candidates seeking Senate seats representing St. Croix used Tuesday night's official debate to present competing approaches to the territory's cost-of-living pressures, hospital

finances, education, crime, workforce retention and economic development, with several candidates framing community involvement, fiscal accountability and youth empowerment as central to addressing daily challenges facing Crucians.

The debate featured the slate of candidates with a place on the Democratic primary ballot as potential St. Croix senators. Senator Angel Bolques Jr., who is running for re-election as senator-at-large, also participated. Senator Kenneth Gittens was absent from the discussion.

Each round of the debate included several questions, with each posed to groups of three candidates.

Household financial pressure was among the first major topics. Senator Kurt Vialet urged the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs to use its authority more aggressively to prevent price gouging. Senator Hubert Frederick focused on a three-part approach: controlling government spending, growing the economy and encouraging personal fiscal prudence among residents. Lisa Charles suggested financial assistance for seniors on fixed incomes, along with a strong job placement program for high school, vocational and university graduates.

Healthcare and the financial condition of the territory's public hospitals also drew significant attention. Responding to a question about improving healthcare services while ensuring hospital financial stability, Senator Clifford Joseph and candidate Linda Brooks both focused on the makeup of the board governing public healthcare facilities.

Mr. Joseph called for "individuals on these boards that are ready to make the tough decisions to make our system work," while Ms. Brooks pointed to vacant board seats and the need for "a financial audit to see where the money is going." That way, she said, "we can get a better understanding of why we don't have the stuff we need in the hospital for the people of the Virgin Islands."

Nemi Jackson argued that the financial strain on the territory's hospitals is directly tied to outdated federal reimbursement formulas. "These reimbursements are not accurate to today's charges for health care," she declared, echoing remarks Governor Albert Bryan Jr. made weeks ago before a committee of United States senators.

Senator Bolques promoted a draft bill moving through the legislative process that would redirect at least some charitable contributions from Economic Development Authority beneficiaries to healthcare institutions.

Currently, EDC/EDA beneficiaries create their own charitable organizations to direct mandated annual donations. "What we're going to do is stop all of that," said Mr. Bolques. He said the bill would classify hospitals as nonprofits eligible for EDC donations and would encourage companies to donate to the territory's healthcare institutions by connecting charitable hospital donations to a fast-tracked EDC reapplication process.

The second round began with a discussion on improving public education. Jose Gonzalez said the best approach is to support teachers. He argued that improving teachers' working environments, ensuring access to affordable housing and providing incentives for Crucians who want to stay in the territory and become educators would help improve education on St. Croix.

Mike Cartier advocated for strengthening career and technical education, aligning education with the needs of local businesses and properly managing federal education funding.

Senator Violet, while asked a different question, briefly pushed for a strong K-3 program with exit and entrance exams “with intervention.” He then turned to the question he had been asked: how to address St. Croix’s rising crime.

Mr. Violet said the answer does not rest solely with government institutions, but with the community. “Every individual that’s stealing a chain walking home with a chain,” he noted. “We have to begin to have the will to be able to tell individuals around us that that behavior is not adequate,” he said. “It is the overall community involvement that is going to reduce crime.”

Ms. Charles also emphasized community involvement, arguing that crime prevention begins with an active childhood and structured activities. “Parents, we need to take responsibility,” she admonished.

Senator Frederick called for reduced reliance on high-density affordable housing and greater emphasis on single-family homes, arguing that crime rates are “traditionally higher” when “you have more clusters of people living in housing communities.” He also said more Virgin Islanders should become legal firearm owners. “Protect yourself and let’s get better neighbourhoods,” Mr. Frederick opined.

The third round opened with questions on brain drain and how to slow or reverse the loss of local talent. Omar Henry advocated for more education and training opportunities, a position also advanced by Mr. Gonzalez. Mr. Cartier said more emphasis should be placed on investing in small businesses, and argued that job placement programs could benefit both workers and employers.

Answering a related question, Senator Frederick said small businesses are being hurt by the territory’s inconsistent and expensive energy supply. He said almost 500 small businesses closed last year. “Imagine how many jobs were lost because of that,” he said, adding that the contraction of the small business sector also hurts government tax collections.

Candidates were also asked where the Virgin Islands should focus its economic diversification efforts over the next decade.

Senator Joseph said it is critical to connect St. Croix’s oil refinery to the local electrical grid to help lower energy prices. He argued that cheaper electricity would encourage investment in the territory. “This is very critical to even most of our existence here,” Mr. Joseph declared.

Ms. Brooks said the focus should be agriculture. Citing the territory’s heavy reliance on imported food, she argued that dependence on imported food should be reduced to approximately 35% to improve food security and keep more money circulating in the local economy. She said funding should be used to incentivize retailers to buy directly from farmers, helping increase local food production.

Ms. Jackson called for the territory to “maximize the potential of the South Shore Enterprise Zone” and encourage light manufacturing in that area.

Mr. Bolques referenced passage of a resolution urging the United States Congress to modernize the Caribbean Basin Initiative to include more industries, including ship registries, fintech, micro distilleries and manufacturing.

Candidates also shared their primary legislative goals if elected and were asked to grade the current Legislature. Grades ranged from B+ to C, with sitting lawmakers rating the Legislature’s work toward the higher end of that range. However, all agreed that there is room for improvement,

citing their candidacies as evidence that more can and should be done for the people of the Virgin Islands.

The Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands will next host a debate between congressional primary hopefuls at 7 p.m. Thursday.

© Viconsortium 2026