

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Avery Lewis Tops St. Thomas-St. John Senate Primary as Four Votes Separate Final Qualifying Spot

Lewis, Blyden and Carla Joseph led the St. Thomas-St. John Senate field, while Rudel Hodge Jr., Shenelle Fina Francis, Ray Fonseca and Joel Browne Connors completed the top seven, with Connors only four votes ahead of Peter Bailey in unofficial results.

Economy / **Published On August 01, 2026 09:23 PM /**

Ernice Gilbert **August 01, 2026**



Senator Avery L. Lewis led the St. Thomas-St. John Democratic Senate primary Saturday, while Joel S. Browne Connors held the seventh and final qualifying position by only four votes over Peter Bailey in the closest legislative result reported on election night.

[Unofficial results](#) released by the Elections System at 8:46 p.m. showed Mr. Lewis receiving 2,724 votes, giving him a 396-vote advantage over Senator Marvin A. Blyden, who placed second with 2,328.

Senator Carla J. Joseph finished third with 2,202 votes. Rudel A. Hodge Jr. placed fourth with 1,587, followed only nine votes behind by Shenelle Fina Francis, who received 1,578.

Senator Ray “PuPa” Fonseca placed sixth with 1,486 votes, while Mr. Browne Connors held seventh with 1,393.

Mr. Bailey received 1,389 votes, leaving him only four votes outside the qualifying group in the unofficial count.

Kashief Hamilton followed with 1,327 votes, Mayard “May” Leader received 1,279, Larence “Lary” Boschulte received 1,089, and Michael A. Smith received 991. The report also listed 784 write-in selections.

Because of the four-vote difference between seventh and eighth place, the final composition of the Democratic slate remains subject to the Elections System’s canvassing and certification process. Certification of primary results is scheduled for August 11, ahead of the November 3 general election.

The unofficial top seven includes four members of the current Legislature — Mr. Lewis, Mr. Blyden, Ms. Joseph and Mr. Fonseca — along with Mr. Hodge, Ms. Francis and Mr. Browne Connors.

Mr. Lewis currently serves as secretary of the 36th Legislature and vice chair of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development. Mr. Blyden chairs the Committee on Housing, Transportation and Telecommunications and serves as vice chair of the Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance.

Ms. Joseph chairs the Committee on Rules and Judiciary, while Mr. Fonseca chairs the Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services.

If the order is certified, the district’s Democratic slate would therefore include four incumbents and three non-incumbents.

The result marked a substantially more competitive Democratic selection process than the district experienced two years ago. There was no St. Thomas-St. John Democratic Senate primary in 2024 because only seven Democratic candidates had entered, matching the number the party could nominate.

This year, 12 candidates competed for the seven positions, producing tight margins in the middle and at the bottom of the qualifying group.

Only nine votes separated Mr. Hodge in fourth from Ms. Francis in fifth. Mr. Fonseca stood 92 votes behind Ms. Francis, while Mr. Browne Connors was 93 votes behind Mr. Fonseca.

The decisive unofficial cutoff was considerably narrower: Mr. Browne Connors' four-vote advantage over Mr. Bailey.

Mr. Hamilton was another 62 votes behind Mr. Bailey, meaning fewer than 70 votes separated seventh place from ninth in the 12-candidate field.

The St. Thomas-St. John contest generated 20,157 candidate selections. Because voters were allowed to choose as many as seven Senate candidates, that total does not represent the number of voters who participated in the district.

The territorial summary did not provide district-specific ballot totals or turnout percentages. It reported 9,991 ballots cast across the primary and territorywide turnout of 47.75 percent.

Mr. Lewis' first-place showing strengthened his position after entering the Legislature as a newly elected senator in 2024. His vote total placed him comfortably ahead of two longer-serving members of the body, Mr. Blyden and Ms. Joseph.

The strength of the three incumbents at the top contrasted with the closely divided competition for the remaining four positions.

Mr. Hodge and Ms. Francis occupied fourth and fifth, respectively, ahead of Mr. Fonseca, a sitting senator. Mr. Browne Connors then narrowly held the final qualifying position over Mr. Bailey.

The Democratic nominees who emerge from certification will move into a broader November contest involving candidates who did not participate in the party primary. The general election will determine which seven candidates represent the St. Thomas-St. John District in the 37th Legislature.

Until the unofficial count is certified, however, the four-vote difference between Mr. Browne Connors and Mr. Bailey remains the central unresolved element of the district's Senate results.