

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. Croix Community Invited To Voice Concerns At Election Town Hall Meeting

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Cynthia Graham **October 26, 2014**

Town Hall Meeting **Election** **2014**

Our leaders here are getting away, every year, with this popularity thing and it has to stop.

These are the sentiments that motivated local personality and community activist, Darren "Bogle" Stevens, to organize a special town hall meeting slated for Tuesday, Oct. 28 at the St. Croix Educational Complex Auditorium at 6:30 p.m. Stevens told the *VI Consortium* the gathering will provide St. Croix voters the opportunity to express their concerns and present their questions directly to candidates running for political office in the 2014 General Election.

The idea to host the island-wide town hall came to Stevens, he said, as he viewed televised gubernatorial and senatorial forums and became discouraged by what he saw.

"We have seen that this [election] season has been filled with forums and debates," Stevens said, "and the forums are not bringing out the facts and the concerns that we, the hardworking people of the Virgin Islands, who are being overworked and under paid, and our children have to leave the Virgin Islands and can't come back, the high WAPA bills, the fuel costs, which are so high and no salary increases--all these things are happening in government and no body is being held accountable for it."

Stevens went on to say that candidates "are not campaigning in the way to impress me or a lot of people to go to the polls and vote for them come Election Day."

He pointed out that with the Nov. 4 General Election just 10 days away and with early voting now in it's second week, many voters remain undecided about the candidates for whom they will cast their votes.

"It's our right to vote and it is also our right to question these candidates because we are giving them a job, and a well paying job of \$85,000 per year, plus perks," Stevens said. "And anybody who needs a job, it could be cleaning a bathroom, they get interviewed, and you get rated by that interview and you are hired accordingly."

Further expanding his analogy of prospective workers being required to undergo a thorough vetting and screening process, Stevens added: "If you're on the job and you're not performing, you get fired; we get write-up, we get suspended, then we get terminated. And there's no kind of criteria in dealing with these candidates for them to become senators, governors or delegate to congress, and it needs to stop. Accountability needs to be clear, as they like to say, transparency."

Stevens said all of the candidates running for political office were invited to participate and many have responded favorably.

"Even the candidates are glad for this opportunity because they'll get the chance to express themselves more, because they are not getting the opportunity," he said, adding that "this is what they want to be involved in--hearing from the people."

Stevens stressed that the gathering is organized independently of any candidate or political party affiliation.

"We don't have anything against any of the candidates, but just like when you're getting a job, you have to prove yourself," he said, pointing out that "this should have been done a long time ago; each island should have had at least one of these."

With that, Stevens offered a grim prediction.

"If we continue this way, in the next four years, we're not going to have any young voters," he said. "The young people who are in high school are not interested and we have to change that."

When asked who should attend the town hall meeting, Stevens emphatically responded, "Everybody."

"I'm talking police officers, correction officers, street cleaners, everybody," he said. "If you have a neighbor that don't have a ride, bring them. Bring your school children, too."

Looking ahead, Stevens said he hopes these gatherings will continue after Election Day.

"In the near future, when they get in, when they settle in, at least every six months we [should] have a town hall meeting," he said, "because whatever you present to me now, I have to make sure that you're doing what you say you're going to do."

With that, Stevens reminded the public of some housekeeping rules in order for the event to run smoothly.

"We want you to ask your questions, but the faster you get through with asking your question, you will give the candidate time to answer the question," he said. "Just make sure you respect one another. If you want respect, you must show respect. So that's what we are looking for that night."

Election Town Hall Meeting

Tuesday, Oct. 28 at 6:30 p.m.

St. Croix Educational Complex Auditorium

Free and open to the public

Suitable for all ages