

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Nelson Explains His 11-Member Senate Measure, Says Current System A Disadvantage To St. Croix

Politics / **Published On March 17, 2015 08:42 PM /**

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Sen. Terrence "Positive" Nelson thinks St. Croix is getting the raw end of the deal because of the current way in which the territory elects its senators. He said that with a larger pool of at-large senators and a smaller allotment of district senators, it would foster a greater level of fairness among the two island districts.

Nelson explained a new bill he is proposing, which is currently in draft form, that would decrease the amount of senators in the Legislature from 15 to 11, and would create five at-large senators instead of one during a press conference he organized Tuesday at Frederiksted's Budhoe Park.

"What we're attempting here will give us some form of district representation and some form of territory-level representation," Nelson said, adding, "because it proposes to have three senators elected from the St. Croix district, three senators elected from the St. Thomas-St. John district -- I must add that Water Island is part of the St. Thomas acreage. And five senators would be elected at large. That creates a Senate of 11 members," he explained.

Just as his proposal to create a [compensation commission](#) that would be responsible for the salaries of elected officials, Nelson said the 11-member Senate proposal did not originate with him.

"This was done in the sixties [and] it worked because there are differences in issues," Nelson said. "There are some issues that's more localized to St. Croix, there are some issues that are more localized to St. Thomas, and there are issues that affect us as an entire territory that we must be able to focus on."

"So, this is almost like creating a [bicameral legislature](#) without creating a bicameral legislature," he said.

The senator acknowledged that similar ideas to his proposal are being discussed and said he would be open to amending his own for a more complete end product.

"I know that there are other methods being proposed, and I know that a retiree organization has a forum coming up, and to be frankly honest, just yesterday I received a correspondence inviting us to participate as a panelist. [But], I believe this would help bring representation closer to the people, and you'll have more representatives who feel responsible for the entire territory," Nelson said.

Then, the senator, now in his sixth term, discussed how the current system negatively affects St. Croix.

"Right now, we see the disproportionate distribution of government resources. It is clear, it is evident in my view," Nelson said.

He continued: "I do not get in the back-and-forth necessarily to point out what's happening in one territory or the next, but it is so evident that a lot more focus and distribution of resources need to be made on St. Croix, that if we do not do this, we'll actually be putting the entire Virgin Islands economy in detriment."

VI Consortium asked Nelson about feedback from other lawmakers on his proposed bill and whether he was getting any push back, since, if the bill goes through, four senators would be out of a job next term.

"I'm not protected from that 'some,'" Nelson said, referring to senators who could be without a job. "So, I'm not doing this with any malicious intentions."

He continued: "I'm doing this because I believe that one, we can perhaps decrease the size [and] two, with the three elected from the St. Croix district and the three elected from the St. Thomas district, those three are pretty much more accountable to those districts."

"Then you have five elected at-large, a block of senators who can sit down and really discuss the territorial issues, and discuss it in a fair way because even though right now we say we have an at-large [senator], it's really unfair because the at-large must be a resident of St. John. That's a [snow job](#) if I've ever seen one," the senator said.

Nelson said he would like to "level the playing field" by including a greater number of at-large senators to serve the territory's residents.

"There's only two political districts, but the at-large must be a resident of one of the political districts? Duh, like the young people say. I would like to level the playing field by at least having more [at-large senators]," he said.

In fact, Nelson's conviction on the matter goes further.

"You know, an ideal model, and some people may not agree with this, is that if we're going to pass laws which impacts the entire territory, the entire territory should have an impact on us [as representatives]. That's a Republican form of government," Nelson said.

Feature Image: Sen. Terrance "Positive" Nelson speaks at press conference at Budhoe Park, Frederiksted, St. Croix, March 17