

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Territory's Senators To Attend Legislative Summit In Seattle Next Month

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VI legislators will defend a resolution that seeks to give territory's residents the right to vote in U.S. General Elections, among other important rights.

ST. CROIX – Members of the 31st Legislature will be out of the territory next month to attend the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) Legislative Summit in Seattle, Washington from August 3 to August 6, 2015. The Annual Conference, dubbed “Senate Summer School”, will host state legislators and staff members from all 50 States including commonwealths and territories, according to a press release Senate President Neville James’ office issued on Tuesday. The bipartisan annual meeting assists lawmakers with improving the quality and effectiveness of their respective

state legislatures.

NCSL also serves as a lobbying body to the US. Congress and enables state legislators to come together to have a strong, cohesive voice on several issues that helps state governments better serve their constituencies. Issues are voted on at the NCSL Summit and then taken to Congress on "Lobby Day" as part of the annual Fall Forum in Washington DC. This year several Resolutions have been introduced and are set to be given a floor vote during 2015 Summit in Seattle. Introduced resolutions this year include State Sovereignty in Online Gaming and The Marketplace Fairness Act, among others.

One particular Resolution on the docket at the upcoming Summit has piqued the interest of many local lawmakers, and if passed by a majority of Senators at NCSL, can potentially play a huge role in the helping the US Virgin Islands gain a stronger voice in gaining the right to vote for Presidential Candidates in the United States presidential elections.

Last August, following the initial introduction of the USVI Citizenship Resolution, seen [here](#), St. Thomas Senator Tregenza Roach was tapped to defend the merits of the proposal. At that meeting Roach explained to lawmakers from across the country, that US Virgin Islanders are unable to elect the President of the United States of America and an unfair, imbalance of rights occurs when Virgin Islanders are mandated to register for the selective service and can be drafted by the same Commander in Chief they cannot vote for. A vote at last year's meeting placed the USVI Citizenship Resolution under the jurisdiction of the NCSL Law, criminal and Public Safety Committee. Without a vote to move it out of committee and unto the Floor at this Summit, the language will expire on August 15, 2015. Lawmakers embarking to this year's Summit have all stated their eagerness to participate and show their support for the Resolution.

"As Virgin Island residents, we can go to war and defend our country, even die for our country... But, we cannot vote for our President. I simply do not agree with this. By having the ability to vote for President, Virgin Islanders will then possess the ability to positively influence decisions and policies which affect our daily lives....A vote is a powerful tool," said Majority Leader Sammuel Sanes.

Senate Public Safety, Homeland Security and Justice Chairman Senator Novelle Francis Jr said, "As a freshman senator, I am looking forward to networking with legislators from around the country. Many of the territory's issues are not unique, and I welcome the opportunity to glean best practices from my counterparts, particularly in the areas of economic development, agriculture, and education reform."

Francis said he is also honored to join his colleagues in supporting the USVI Citizenship Resolution. In addition to the resolution, Senators will also participate in their respective Standing Committees at the NCSL Conference. Senators from the Virgin Islands, based on their strengths and preferences serves on at least one or two of Eight Standing Committees, composed of legislators and legislative staff. Each Committee provides a means by which state legislators can share experience, information, and advice on a variety of state issues ranging from policy to management

Freshman Senator Jean A. Forde, who has been appointed to serve on NCSL's Education Committee, says he welcomes the opportunity to learn and to exchange information and ideas that can benefit the people of the territory.

"Obviously this will be my first time attending, but from everything I have read and heard this is the one conference that no state legislator should miss," Forde said. "On issues ranging from education and health care to energy and economic development, we will be receiving briefings from some of the most renowned policy experts in the country. In addition, we will be sharing experiences and representing the territory's interests in our meetings with state legislators from around the nation," he added.

"I'm looking forward to networking with other senators from different states, and learning how they dealt with issues similar to the ones we now face in the Virgin Islands, and to bring back that knowledge to help me propose legislation that will make a difference to the residence of the U.S. Virgin Islands." - Senator Marvin A. Blyden "

Senate President Neville James, who has been appointed to serve on NCSL's Executive Committee said it's important for lawmakers to continue their advancement of knowledge in seeking educational opportunities that will broaden their scope of understanding, and help them be more effective legislators.

"The exposure to the information offered this year will be invaluable to those who have never been in this type of political arena before. I'm looking forward to serving on the executive committee this term, I'm also eager to learn about policies and solutions that other states are working on, and about issues that are trending nationally." James said.

The National Conference of State Legislatures is a bipartisan organization that serves the legislators and staffs of the nation's 50 states, its commonwealths and territories. NCSL provides research, technical assistance and opportunities for policymakers to exchange ideas on the most pressing state issues federal agencies. The leadership of NCSL is composed of legislators and staff from across the country. The NCSL Executive Committee provides overall direction on operations of the Conference.

Image Credit: NCSL