

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Joint Board Denies Republicans Request To Submit Election Candidates After Deadline

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ST. CROIX -- The Joint Board of Elections on Wednesday denied a request by the Republican Party of the Virgin Islands, chaired by John Canegata that asked the board, according to Joint Board Chairman Arturo Watlington, Jr., to grant the G.O.P. "the authority and right to submit nominations for public office after their convention of June 11."

Board members overwhelmingly disapproved, with some contending that the move would set a dangerous precedent.

"I think the time has past. Unless we're going to make exceptions for everyone, I don't know how we can make an exception for the Republican Party," said board member Lisa Harris-Moorhead.

Ms. Moorhead also brought up a pending court issue that has fractured the local Republican party, contending that it further complicates the matter of approving the party's request to submit nominations after the May 17 deadline.

On May 28 at the Windward Passage in St. Thomas, there was a call to convention by a group of Republicans, to include former Senator Holland Redfield, James Oliver, Herbert Schoenbohm, Warren B. Cole and others. There, they elected 28 members to the Territorial Committee and replaced Mr. Canegata as chairman of the party with Mr. Cole.

But the gathering was declared invalid by Judge Harold Willocks, who ruled in Mr. Canegata's favor a day before by granting his faction of the Republican party a temporary restraining order against the other group, rendering their May 28 convention moot.

"Why would we get involved before the court rules on the substantive issue?" Ms. Moorhead questioned. "Why would we allow one faction or another to do anything until the court makes a determination as to the merits of the case? Why would we as the board inject ourselves in the Republican party issue yet again?"

Board member Roland Moolenar said that the calendar was clear, suggesting that he would stand with board members who opposed the Republicans' request.

"Time has passed," said board member Ivy Moses.

Mr. Watlington hinted that he was not against allowing the Republicans to submit there nominations, noting that nothing in Virgin Islands Code mandates a specific date of submission.

"I have no problems provided that it doesn't force a contest in any race [or] primary," he said. "Given the circumstances that have brought us to where we are today with pending legislation -- some suggesting that we would have no primaries; that parties would be responsible for conducting whatever process they want and be responsible for paying -- so that's my position on that." Mr. Watlington was referring to election reform bills he said were still pending.

But the chairman's opinion did not sway the majority, who wound up voting to reject the Republicans' request.

"In our December meeting, we discussed and set a deadline for parties to submit their process. At some point again we had moved as a district to allow them to make submissions no later than March 31. At no point in time, at least to my recollection, did we ever receive any information within those periods and timelines," said St. Croix board member Raymond Williams, referring to correspondence from Republicans concerning problems to meet the filing deadline.

"Moreover, there's a common filing date we as a majority of the board decided that we're going to post primary elections for public offices, and following through that, anyone

that's registered for office had to file their nominating petitions by the common filing date."

He added: "I will not support any slate that is submitted by any faction of the Republican Party. [And] if the Joint Board set a policy to accept it, I am not going to certify any ballot that maintains anybody other than Robert Moorehead."

According to the Elections System, Mr. Moorehead is the only Republican running for Senate. Republicans who have filed for nomination petitions for the Board of Elections include Lilliana Belardo de O'Neal, Jevon Williams and Glenn Webster.

Of the 14 members who make up the Joint Board, 10 were present yesterday. Eight voted in favor of a motion to deny the Republicans' request, with Mr. Watlington voted against the motion. Ms. Belardo de O'Neal abstained.