

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Incumbent Senators Stress Unity At Senatorial Forum As Hansen's Candidacy Looms Large

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Ernice Gilbert **October 20, 2016**



ST. CROIX -- Ten candidates vying for a seat in the 32nd Legislature on November 8 sat next to each other in the University of the Virgin Islands' Great Hall at the Albert A. Sheen Campus, fielding questions gathered by the institution's Student Government Association and the Golden Key International Honour Society.

The event, which lasted about two hours, was mostly cordial, as candidates stuck to the issues and gave their best attempt at answering the questions. But as the time passed, a theme began to emerge. All of the incumbent senators present at the forum -- Senators Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly, Sammuell Sanes, Positive Nelson, Novelle Francis, Kurt Vialet and Neville James -- spoke of a unity they enjoy in the 31st Legislature that has allowed

them to get things done for St. Croix.

"This is a group that have worked very, very, very well together. And this is a group that have worked in the best interest of St. Croix, and every single measure that you see that have come to the 31st Legislature for St. Croix, this group have voted for it, and have mandated that St. Croix gets the lion's share," Mr. Violet said.

Mr. Violet and the other incumbents, sensing a resurgence of candidate Alicia Hansen, a seasoned politician and former senator with a brash political style, and whom many expect to be reelected on November 8, urged, if not directly, voters to keep the current batch of senators in office. On multiple occasions they praised one another's efforts and the positive results born out of the unity.

At her first go, Mrs. Hansen chastised current lawmakers for what she said was a measure approved by the current Legislature that allows the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority to charge customers three months in back pay, if W.A.P.A. decides that it had estimated their power consumption wrong. And she listed a number of items that she had accomplished during her tenure in the Senate, contending that some senators don't like when she mention her accomplishments, "but if I don't tell you, none of them [will]. I don't belong to a party," she said.

Her tone last night only reinforced the current lawmakers' trepidation. Yet, Mrs. Hansen appeared to have gotten her message across; painting herself as a tough messenger of the people, who gets things done one way or another.

If anything, last night's performance by Mrs. Hansen kept her on her current trajectory. Though her knack for combat did show last night (referring to Mr. James, who had challenged Mrs. Hansen's claim that she was the one who brought the nursing program to UVI, Mrs. Hansen said she does not frequent prostitution houses and she does not gamble), the former senator mostly stuck to the issues.

But there was an aura of inevitability that lingered relative to Mrs. Hansen's candidacy, who over the years has built a strong, undying core of supporters that stick with her come what may. The current harmony in the Senate, then, may well be disturbed, as senators brace themselves for a familiar face come early January after the November 8 election.

Whatever the results, though, incumbents said they would accept it.

"We live in a democracy that respects the rights of voters," said Mr. Violet, whose reelection is not in question as he was the top vote-getter during the primary election. "So whoever voters decide to elect, those are the seven individuals that will serve, and that is democracy in the United States of America."

"I will live with the results on November 8," said Mr. James, whose candidacy remains in question following a weak showing during the primary election. "Win, lose or draw, I'm a Crucian, I'm not going from here; I don't have to win to stay here. I could lose and stay here. I support St. Croix, that's why I say, 'St. Croix all the time. I'm not in the fighting business; I am about working together so we could fight for St. Croix, not fighting one another. That's a losing proposition."

Other participants in last night's forum included Robert Moorhead, Terence D. Joseph and Danny Emmanuel. The forum was moderated by Albert Bryan, Jr.

