

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Janelle Sarauw Wins Special Election In St. Thomas-St. John District

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ST. THOMAS -- Janelle K. Sarauw has won today's special election, according to voting data provided by the Elections System of the Virgin Islands.

Although the numbers are expected to see slight changes when all votes are tallied, Ms. Sarauw's lead is expected to hold. She won over her closest competitor, former Senator Justin Harrigan, Sr., who collected over 900 votes, while Ms. Sarauw carried over 1,200 (all results are below). She will be the youngest amongst her peers, and is registered as an Independent.

Ms. Sarauw's win is a culmination of a protracted battle that started in court, following the revelation that Kevin Rodriguez, who had won a seat in the 32nd Legislature, may have been in violation of the territory's residency laws. Mr. Rodriguez took his battle to the Third Circuit Court of Appeals and is still awaiting a ruling.

Background

On January 25, 2016, Mr. Rodriguez filed a bankruptcy petition in the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Middle District of Tennessee. In his bankruptcy petition, Mr. Rodriguez swore under penalty of perjury that he lived in Tennessee and had not lived in another state anytime during the preceding three years. On November 8, 2016, the Virgin Islands held an election to choose senators to serve in the 32nd Legislature of the Virgin Islands. The District of St. Thomas-St. John was allotted seven seats to be filled by the top seven vote-getters.

After the election, Mr. Rodriguez placed sixth while Sarauw placed eighth. The Board of Elections certified the election results on November 22, 2016. On December 9, 2016, Sarauw and Berry, the latter being a volunteer for Sarauw's campaign, filed a complaint in the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands. The complaint named as defendants Mr. Rodriguez; the Virgin Islands Joint Board of Elections; the Board of Elections St. Thomas & St. John; and Caroline F. Fawkes, the supervisor of elections. Ms. Sarauw and Ms. Berry alleged that Mr. Rodriguez was not qualified to serve in the Virgin Islands Legislature because he had not been "a bona fide resident of the Virgin Islands for at least three years next preceding the date of his election."

Developments

Multiple rulings followed, one of the most consequential being the Virgin Islands Supreme Court decision that [barred Mr. Rodriguez from being seated one day before inauguration](#). Mr. Rodriguez would later file with the District Court of the Virgin Islands, naming the Virgin Islands Legislature and its current president, Myron Jackson, as defendants. Mr. Rodriguez's preferred outcome would have seen the District Court forcing the Legislature to seat him. A subsequent suit was filed by Ms. Sarauw and Ms. Berry in the District Court against Mrs. Fawkes, the Joint Board of Elections, and the St. Thomas-St. John District Board of Elections.

In the end, however, a ruling by District Court Judge Curtis Gomez did not force the Legislature to act on the matter — stating it remains a coequal branch of government — and, while it did not explicitly ask Governor Kenneth Mapp to call a special election, the court concluded that the governor had the right — even duty — to do just that to remedy the tumultuous saga.

Ms. Sarauw joins the Legislature at a time when constituents are looking closely at the body's actions -- a heightened awareness encouraged by the territory's current fiscal condition, with a structural deficit of over \$100 million as of last month, that the government is struggling to offset.

The senator will also face a Legislature that has grown contentious over the recent sin tax debates, with Democrats aligning with Governor Kenneth Mapp in passing the measure, while the no party lawmakers -- and Democrat Janette Millin Young -- stood in

opposition.

On her Facebook page, Ms. Sarauw lists her interests as public safety, economic diversification, education, health and athletics.

[Read the original document](#)

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