

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Embolden By Court Ruling, Democratic Party Calls On Legislature To Seat Rodriquez

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ST. THOMAS -- The Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands in a release issued Saturday, said that members of the 32nd Legislature, whose majority is made up of nine Democrats, should seat beleaguered Senator-elect Kevin Rodriquez, whose chances of becoming a member of the body after winning a seat during the November 8 general election, had waned considerably following a challenge by Janelle Sarauw that questioned Mr. Rodriquez's eligibility to be a senator based on residency issues.

The saga unfolded over several months, with various victories being handed to both the Rodriquez and Sarauw camps. But the Third Circuit Court of Appeals on Friday handed a major victory to Mr. Rodriquez, when it said that only the 32nd Legislature can determine

Mr. Rodriquez's fate.

"With this ruling, the 32nd Legislature should fulfill its statutory obligation to judge Rodriquez's qualifications for membership in the Legislature," the appellate court said.

The V.I. Democratic Party, pleased with the outcome of the case, used the opportunity to make its stance on the matter clear. "We have always held to the position that the matter was under the jurisdiction and authority of the Legislature. The appellate court has clearly affirmed this," reads the release. "We are again calling on the entire 32nd legislature, and in particular on the Democratic leadership, to immediately administer the oath of office to Senator-elect Kevin Rodriquez."

That Mr. Rodriquez would not be seated by fellow Democrats would be a stunning embarrassment for the party, and would also bring to the fore fractures among its ranks. Yet, signs of disunity within the party is already evident, with Senate President Myron Jackson, a Democrat, [in April](#) urging the St. Thomas Board of Elections to seat Ms. Sarauw -- even as the Minority Caucus called for the Senate to decide Mr. Rodriquez's fate.

"The Board of Elections needs to do the job it is statutorily mandated to do, which is to certify the Special Election," Mr. Jackson said, referring to the April 8 special election called by Governor Kenneth Mapp that saw Ms. Sarauw being the victor.

Around the same time, Senator Tregenza Roach, an Independent lawmaker and part of the five-member minority, said, "I really believe that the Legislature missed an opportunity to provide closure in this matter early on. The [legislature's] legal counsel opinion made it clear that we were required to act, and as provided in the Organic Act, we would have had the opportunity to make the final decision on whether or not Senator-elect Kevin Rodriquez would be seated as a member of the body."

The Democratic Party's St. Thomas District committee in today's release gave a timeline showing its support for Mr. Rodriquez. The committee said that on December 14, 2016, the party affirmed its support of Mr. Rodriquez as the senator- elect to the 32nd Legislature. On January 19, 2017, the party decried the fact that Mr. Rodriquez was still not seated, contending that residents of St. Thomas were not being fully represented. And on February 7, 2017, once the VI District Court issued its opinion, the party said it immediately called on the Legislature's leadership to swear-in Mr. Rodriquez.

Feature Image: Myron Jackson, the new Senate president, leads the way during a swearing-in ceremony of the 32nd Legislature. (Credit: Government House)