

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Senate Democrats Should Leave The Party If They Are Unwilling To 'Immediately' Seat Kevin Rodriquez, Party Says

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ST. THOMAS -- The St. Thomas District Democratic Party, in a release issued late Wednesday, toughened its stance on the matter of Senator-elect Kevin Rodriquez, no longer simply requesting that Mr. Rodriquez be seated by the 32nd Legislature, but asking that senators who are registered as Democrats "immediately" take the action of seating the senator-elect, or hold a swearing-in ceremony that amounts to the same.

The party's emboldened stance follows the [Third Circuit Court of Appeals' ruling](#) opining that only the 32nd Legislature can determine Mr. Rodriquez's fate. "With this ruling, the

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

In its release on Wednesday, the party said Senate Democrats should leave the Party if they're unwilling to act unitedly and swear-in or immediately seat Mr. Rodriguez.

"There should be no debate regarding his qualifications to be seated as a senator," reads the release. "Thereafter there are specific charges that should be brought against him as a senator, then those written charges which affect his qualifications shall be served on him so he can be in a position to defend." It was not clear whether charges have been levied against Mr. Rodriguez.

"If our Democratic senators cannot adhere to such a process, then they should discontinue being Democratic senators," reads the release.

The hardened stance represents the Democratic Party's boldest move so far in attempting to coalesce members in the effort to seat Mr. Rodriguez.

Yet, that Mr. Rodriguez 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. Already complicating the matter of unity, are the signs of contention within the party that's already evident, with Senate President Myron Jackson, a Democrat, [in April](#) urging the St. Thomas Board of Elections to seat special election winner Janelle Sarauw — even as the [Minority Caucus](#) called for the Senate to decide Mr. Rodriguez'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 Rodriguez would be seated as a member of the body."

In a release issued last week, the territorial Democratic Party gave a timeline showing its support for Mr. Rodriguez. It said that on December 14, 2016, the party affirmed its support of the senator-elect to the 32nd Legislature. On January 19, 2017, the party decried the fact that Mr. Rodriguez 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. Rodriguez.