

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Why Senators Voted How They Voted On The Rodriquez Matter

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The 32nd Legislature has finally dealt with the matter of Kevin Rodriquez, with a majority of the body -- 8-6 -- deciding that Mr. Rodriquez was ineligible to be a member of the Senate.

During Tuesday's session, it was difficult to discern who a majority of the lawmakers would vote for. But their intentions became clearer on Wednesday, and as deliberations came to a close, predicting the outcome was not a difficult task.

Here's how and why they voted on the matter of seating Mr. Rodriquez

Kurt Violet, No: Mr. Violet expressed concern throughout the session on both days that a decision to seat Mr. Rodriguez would set a bad precedent, because it would promote the notion that one can commit perjury without consequence.

Janette Millin Young, Yes: Mrs. Millin Young from the onset believed that Mr. Rodriguez should have been seated after being elected by the people of the Virgin Islands; her stance being that the senator-elect became a member of the body upon his election.

Myron Jackson, No: For Mr. Jackson, the Supreme Court's decision in January to bar Mr. Rodriguez from taking the oath of office reigned over any other decision other courts made.

Positive Nelson, Yes: Mr. Nelson admitted that he had concerns about Mr. Rodriguez's probity, but his decision to vote in favor of the senator-elect was based on the merits of residency.

Novelle Francis, No: Like Mr. Jackson, Mr. Francis held in high regard the V.I. Supreme Court's January ruling: "For me, the most convincing and persuasive decision that was made was made by the Supreme Court," he said today.

Marvin Blyden, initially not voting, quickly switched to No: Mr. Blyden seemed conflicted; Mr. Rodriguez had worked for him when the senator-elect moved back to the territory in 2013. So instead of making the issue about residency, Mr. Blyden sought to rely on the matter of perjury, which, in the territory, is a crime of moral turpitude.

Tregenza Roach, Yes: Mr. Roach sought to rely on the residency issue as well, and argued as such. At one point on Tuesday, Mr. Roach said it troubled his core, that he, who was born in St. Kitts, had to question the eligibility of Mr. Rodriguez to serve the land in which he was born.

Alicia Hansen, Yes: Like her Minority Caucus members, Mrs. Hansen sought to stick to the issue of residency, and argued that Mr. Rodriguez had clearly lived in the territory from 2013-2016.

Neville James, No: Mr. James said the issue of perjury was a major deciding factor for him. "At the end of the day, he undermined being a bona fide resident [of the U.S. Virgin Islands] by telling the state of Tennessee that I am a resident [of Tennessee] and I've been living here for three years, and only in Tennessee for three years," he said.

Jean Forde, No: Although at times he seemed to support Mr. Rodriguez, Mr. Forde voted against him. The senator said he would not judge the man's character, but instead rely on evidence brought to the fore during the two-day session to inform his vote.

Sammuel Sanes, No: Mr. Sanes praised Mr. Rodriguez's efforts in saving his family's home, but for Sanes, doing the right thing -- although he suggested that he might have done the same for his family if placed in Mr. Rodriguez's position at the time -- trumped all else.

Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly, No: Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly's stance was detectable from the beginning. She came well prepared to pepper Mr. Rodriguez with pressing questions, and even caused the senator-elect to stumble.

Dwayne DeGraff, Yes: Mr. DeGraff was convinced that Mr. Rodriguez was a resident of the Virgin Islands eligible to participate in the 2016 general election. Many of his arguments were built from that foundation.

Brian Smith, Yes: Mr. Smith broke away from his Democratic colleagues and voted in favor of seating Mr. Rodriguez, his decision to do so being based on a conviction that Mr. Rodriguez should not be judged for his wrong doings in his personal life, but whether he met the residency criteria.