

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Turmoil In Democratic Ranks As Three Members Are Asked To Leave Party Over Rodriquez Vote

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ST. THOMAS -- In a release issued late Thursday, former delegate to Congress Donna Christensen, Territorial Democratic Party state chair, said it was "premature and perhaps wistful thinking" to assume that the Wednesday vote by fellow Democrats to reject Senator-elect Kevin Rodriquez as a member of the 32nd Legislature, would bring about the demise of the party.

Ms. Christensen appeared to be responding to a note from the chairman of the St. Thomas District Democratic Party, Edgar Baker Phillips, who announced on Wednesday following the vote against Mr. Rodriquez, that Democratic senators Myron Jackson, Jean Forde and Marvin Blyden were no longer members of the party's executive committee in

the St. Thomas district.

"I suggest that you all three resign from being members of the Democratic Party," Mr. Phillips charged. "Your vote of today clearly cements the fact that you have no loyalty to the party." Mr. Phillips later added, "You have cast your votes, now move on and continue to support the opposition party."

Mr. Phillips was livid that fellow Democrats chose not to stand by Mr. Rodriguez, holding to the opinion that the senator-elect met the residency requirements needed to run for the Senate in the territory. Mr. Phillip also revived a previous grievance with the Democrats, who had voted to remove symbol voting, which Mr. Phillips believes benefited Democrats.

At least two of the senators booted from the Democratic Party's executive committee in the St. Thomas-St. John district, responded to Mr. Phillips, though only one -- Myron Jackson -- actually gave a quote. Stating that he would not leave the party, Mr. Jackson said he hails from a long line of Democrats, "and I don't need anyone's blessing or directive" to be part of the Democratic Party, he said. He also questioned the party's leadership in the St. Thomas-St. John District, stating that it should be reexamined.

Mr. Blyden refused to respond out of passion, stating that he needed to clear his head before he wound up saying the wrong things. "Give me until tomorrow when I clear my head, okay?" he said.

The vote against Mr. Rodriguez by fellow Democrats, Senator Novelle Francis agreed, has fractured the party. "I truly believe that as a result of this, it will require some healing," Mr. Francis said. "But ultimately we have one individual that obviously had an unfortunate situation, that individual being Kevin Rodriguez, from the entire party. That's unbelievable to me," said the bewildered senator, wondering aloud how the party's leadership was causing such a ruckus for one man, and suggested that there were enough members in the current Senate who are Democrats to keep the party's agenda moving forward.

Ms. Christensen said while the vote against Mr. Rodriguez, which came at the hand of only Democrats, "caused a body blow" to the party, she said the party was not made up of one individual, echoing Mr. Francis's sentiments. "The party is not about one candidate or senator or groups of either. And each elected official should act in accord with the laws of the land and their conscience," she said. Ms. Christensen's release served as a buffer to the chastising missive written by Mr. Phillips.

"Yes, we support those running on the party ticket and platform. We take positions and urge but cannot dictate that they be adhered to. We do not remove individuals from our party but actions are weighed in terms of future support," Ms. Christensen said.