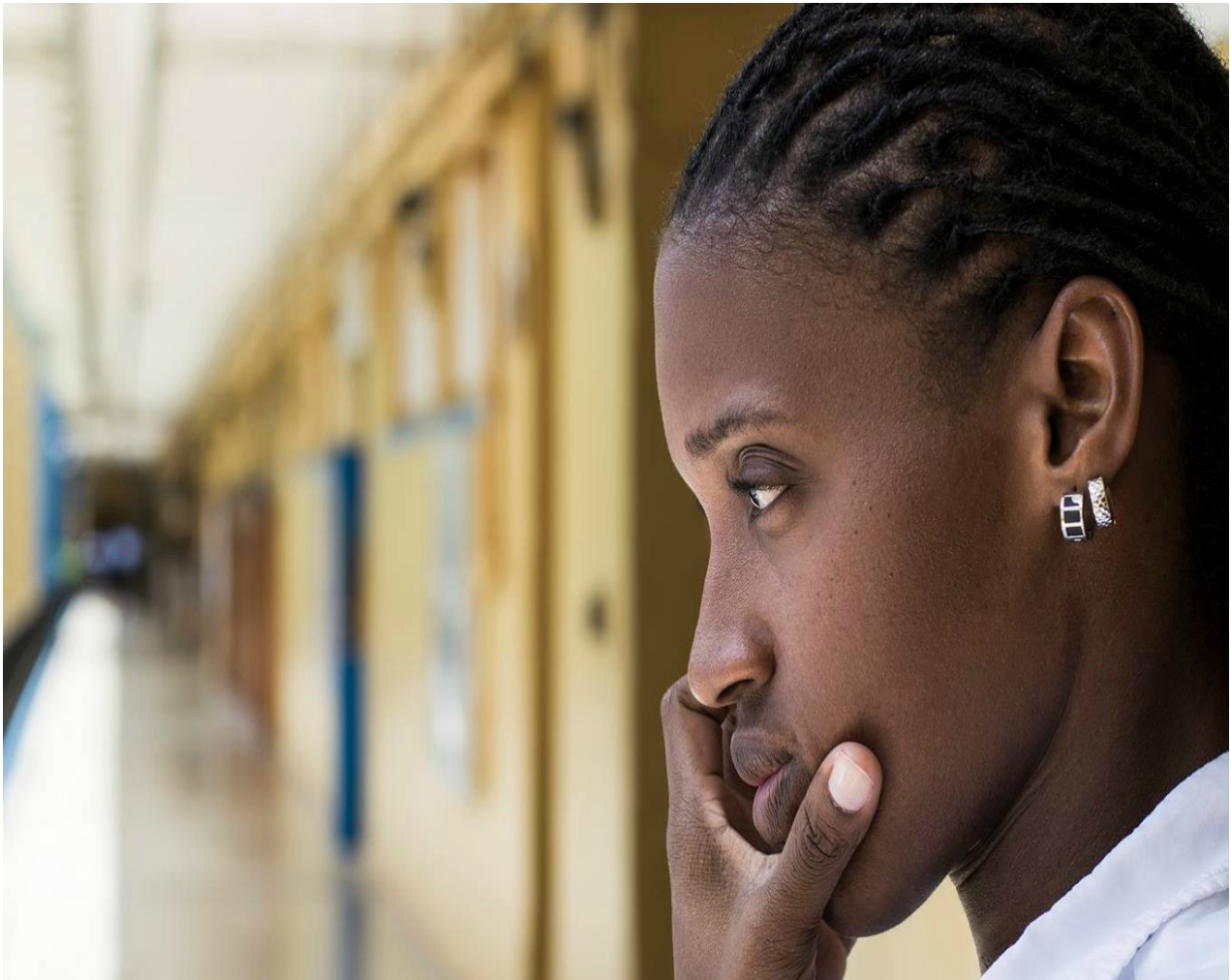


The Virgin Islands Consortium

Senate President Calls On Board Of Elections To Certify Janelle Sarauw

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ST. THOMAS -- The president of the 32nd Legislature, Myron Jackson, on Thursday called on the St. Thomas-St. John Board of Elections to certify the candidacy of the April 8 special election winner, Janelle Sarauw, now that the matter of Kevin Rodriguez has been dealt with. Lawmakers on Wednesday [rejected Mr. Rodriguez](#) in a two-day marathon Senate session, with a majority of Democrats unconvinced that they should vote in favor of seating the senator-elect as he had apparently lied about his residency to a bankruptcy court in Tennessee in an effort to save the home that his estranged wife at the time, along with their two daughters, lived in.

[\[Read: Why Senators Voted How They Voted On The Rodriguez Matter \]](#)

Mr. Jackson's call to seat Ms. Sarauw came in the form of a letter addressed to the St. Thomas-St. John District Board of Elections Chairwoman, Barbara Jackson McIntosh, and Arturo Watlington, Jr., the vice chairman. It confirms the Senate's Wednesday vote rejecting Mr. Rodriguez, and says the Senate remains without a 15th senator.

"Prior to the legislature's vote that Mr. Rodriguez was not a member of the 32nd Legislature, the St. Thomas-St. John Board of Elections took the position that it would not certify the prevailing candidate as the senator-elect for the St. Thomas-St. John district because Kevin Rodriguez was already certified as a senator-elect," reads the letter. Mr. Jackson, in the letter, is referring to Ms. Sarauw, who won the April 8 special election. "As a consequence of the Legislature's vote, there is no longer an impediment to the St. Thomas-St. John Board of Elections certifying the prevailing candidate as the winning candidate from the April 8 special election."

The letter adds: "As such, the 32nd Legislature of the Virgin Islands requests that the prevailing candidate be certified as the winner of the April 8, 2017 special election, so that the legislature may swear the candidate in as senator."

On April 8, Ms. Sarauw won over her closest competitor, former Senator Justin Harrigan, Sr., who collected over 900 votes, while Ms. Sarauw carried her victory with over 1,200 votes. If she is seated, Ms. Sarauw will be the youngest among her peers, and is registered as an Independent. Whether or not she will side with the Minority Caucus whose members are mostly Independents, or the Democrats who cleared the likely path — or whether Ms. Sarauw will remain independent in the true sense of the word — remains to be seen.

The letter from Mr. Jackson follows [harsh words](#) from the St. Thomas-St. John District Democratic Party Chairman, who told Mr. Jackson and his colleagues Marvin Blyden and Jeane Forde, to leave the Democratic Party because they had voted against Mr. Rodriguez. The three men were also advised that they were no longer members of the Democratic Party's executive committee in the relative district.

"I suggest that you all three resign from being members of the Democratic Party," Chairman Edgar Baker 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."

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.

Former delegate to Congress and current Territorial Democratic Party State Chair, Donna Christensen, said in a release issued Thursday that 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.