

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Allison Petrus Announces Gubernatorial Bid

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Ernice Gilbert **January 29, 2018**



ST. THOMAS -- Former senator and well-known businessman in St. Thomas, Allison Petrus, on Sunday evening announced his run for governor in the 2018 general election, joining a healthy list of candidates vying for the territory's top office in November against the sitting governor, Kenneth Mapp.

At his business complex across from the Seaborne Airline seaplane terminal here, Mr. Petrus -- flanked by his wife, daughters, friends whose lives he helped thrust to success and other family members -- Mr. Petrus said his bid for governor was not based on the idea of making money, as he's already been quite successful with his array of business ventures, but rather to better the lives of Virgin Islanders. And he spoke of running a campaign above the expected attack-and-conquer game, and said the current position of

the territory is "less about Mapp and more about the moment."

The turnout, (many attendees only got notice of the gathering either late Saturday or early Sunday), was strong nonetheless, even after a downpour that somewhat altered the event.

"The one thing I always tell people is that this whole journey is about giving back, making a difference to humanity," Mr. Petrus said. "Before your time comes where you go to the south side of the grass, what have you done to improve humanity? And that's what I'm all about."

He spoke in lauding terms about his wife. "The first smart thing that I've ever done was I married up," he said, the words catching his wife off guard, who seemed pleasantly surprised. A brief, affectionate hug followed, along with more praise from Mr. Petrus. "Beverly. She is an awesome, awesome person. I love her to death, she is my best friend. We get on each other's nerves sometimes but that's what love is all about."

The candidate, whose sudden announcement changed the dynamics of the upcoming Democratic primary election, placing added pressure on the other Democrats running for governor, sought to give his audience a glimpse into his upbringing, which he described as humble. "We grew up in a small, two-bedroom apartment," he revealed. "There were several days where we would have no water from WAPA, so what my brother and I had to do, was to get some Grand Union karts, get some gallon bottles, travel over to Charlotte Amalie High School, fill those bottles so that we can get water to flush the toilet." Mr. Petrus said his mother, who is deceased, provided for her family on a \$6,000 annual salary. "My life has not been about a silver spoon in my mouth. I grew up on public assistance; I do not hesitate to say that because my mother worked hard," Mr. Petrus said as he recounted his days growing up in the Oswald Harris Court housing community.

Mr. Petrus also spoke of his early struggles with education, only to later earn multiple degrees -- accomplishments he credited to a teacher, Mary Lew Harvey, who used to encourage him. "All I hope to do is to be the Mary Lew Harley in a lot of people's lives in these islands. All I aspire to do is to make a difference in this place."

Last night's speech was less about policy and more about introduction, Mr. Petrus's qualifications to serve as the territory's governor and who he is. "The legacy that I want to live is not about things, it's about a memory of these kids remembering their father as someone who gave to those who were less fortunate," the candidate said.

Stating that his run for governor shocked even him, Mr. Petrus added, "I never aspired to be the governor of these islands because the only thing I ever aspired to do is make a difference in people's lives, and that never entailed politics." He mentioned the ruthless nature of politics but decided to run regardless, asking, if politics were to be left to the callous, what would happen to the people who live in the society these politicians occupy?

And speaking of politics, Mr. Petrus is embarking on what some would say is an impossible mission: to transform the dirty nature of campaigning to something more civil. "Politics is all about the negative, but we are going to change minds and we're going to

bring you kicking and screaming. Because many of you are going to say, 'No, you got to be negative, you got to go after their throats.' You're not going to see me out there throwing stones because the moment is too great. We have to start cultivating a mentality that is totally different," he said.

It's too early to determine how Mr. Petrus's arrival will affect the political climate, but he is a well-known and almost universally loved figure in St. Thomas. Residents The Consortium spoke to were shocked and excited to learn of the announcement.

But on St. Croix, he is a mostly unknown name, although Mr. Petrus served in the Senate [in the late 90s](#) representing the St. Thomas district. Political observers have concluded that his pick for lieutenant governor on St. Croix must be strong to corral support on the big island.

Either way, his bid places pressure on the current crowd of gubernatorial candidates in the Democratic primary -- Adlah Donastorg, Albert Bryan, Jr., Randolph Bennett, Moleto Smith and Angel Dawson -- to work harder.