

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Sunday Edition | Senator-At-Large Smith Sinks Himself

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2018 CAMPAIGNS AND ELECTIONS BY TERI HELENESE

Senator-at-Large, Brian A. Smith's re-election to the 33 Legislature of the U.S. Virgin Islands, in the Democratic Primary on August 4, weighs in the balance and is in serious jeopardy in the wake of his latest Government Employees Retirement System feature: 'SAVE GERS,' caught on video on Tuesday, April 3, at the Sunny Isle Shopping Center on St. Croix.

During an exchange with Ernice Gilbert, a V.I. Consortium journalist, Smith told Gilbert he was protesting on the corner to "save GERS." When Gilbert challenged Smith's role as an elected official and his poor use of time by being on the corner in Sunny Isle versus working to craft legislation on behalf of U.S. Virgin Islanders, Smith said, "Don't ask me what I'm doing standing on the corner. What I'm doing standing on the corner is to bring

awareness to the issues, okay.”

Gilbert followed up, “Senator, you are a senator. You are supposed to be crafting legislation, not on the corner telling the territory to save GERS.” Smith quipped, “Do what you gotta do buddy. Make yourself happy.”

The unfunded liability at GERS is \$2.82 billion. Smith’s protest in Sunny Isle is a penny wise, pound foolish, and confirms his priorities are misplaced—so much so, his futile attempt to “SAVE GERS” may cement his loss in the election on August 4.

The worst part: The bottom is about to fall out at GERS. Instead of Smith sitting in his office to work with his colleagues and staff in the Legislature to craft legislation to save GERS; instead of Smith scheduling and having a meeting of the minds with GERS Administrator Austin Nibbs to review and enhance legislation he has crafted to protect pensioners and future retirees, the best idea Smith could come up with was to write a sign, and parade it on the corner in Sunny Isle—all on taxpayers’ dime and time.

Using taxpayer money for transportation, and with his “SAVE GERS,” sign in tow, on Tuesday, Smith boarded a boat from St. John to St. Thomas. When he arrived at the Red Hook dock, a Legislature driver was there to meet him and drive him to the airport for his flight to St. Croix.

Again on the taxpayers’ dime, Smith used a government ticket paid for with taxpayer money for his flight to St. Croix. When he arrived on St. Croix, a Legislature driver was there to meet him as well, and drive him to his “protest” site at the main traffic light intersection at Sunny Isle.

After several hours of Smith protesting at the intersection, a Legislature driver picked him up and drove him back to the airport. Of course, the round trip travel back to St. Thomas was paid for by taxpayers.

When Smith arrived in St. Thomas, another Legislature driver was there for the senator’s trip back to the Red Hook dock, and yet another taxpayer covered boat ticket was required to return to St. John.

When Smith protests at the Emile Griffith Ballpark on St. Thomas, like he did in February, the misuse of taxpayer funds are the same, minus the airfare.

Let’s do the math. Senator Smith’s annual salary is \$85,000. The salary of a driver in the Legislature is approximately \$30,000. A round trip ticket to St. Croix starts at \$200 and can go up to \$300 depending on when one books. A gallon of gas on St. Thomas costs between \$3.49 and \$3.89. A gallon of gas on St. Croix ranges between \$2.59 and \$2.89.

If we add Smith’s hourly rate, plus the hourly wage of the Legislature drivers’ paid time, plus the round trip ticket, plus the gas, voters can begin to see just how reckless Senator Smith’s financial waste and abuse is, while GERS is on the brink of collapse—the same GERS Smith claims he wants to save.

Senator Smith is privileged to be a member of the 32 Legislature of the U.S. Virgin Islands and part of the 10-member Majority, but his behavior in Sunny Isle and at the Emile Griffith Ballpark are more in line with that of a young child, who doesn’t have the

fiduciary responsibility and discipline necessary to manage taxpayer money; the emotional intelligence to answer a journalist and constituent —respectfully and diplomatically; the situational awareness necessary to understand how voters form opinions; and the verbal communications skills necessary to amplify his brand, message, and reputation.

In watching the 2:07 minute video, U.S. Virgin Islanders and audiences across the globe learned that Smith is severely challenged in these key areas. To add insult to injury, it has surfaced that Smith leaves legislative meetings where he is required to provide meaningful input, only to be seen in social settings about town, and at intersections and locations similar to Sunny Isle and the Emile Griffith Ballpark.

If Smith would do this on a Saturday, Sunday, or holiday and did not involve Legislature employees or taxpayer resources, his recent antics would still be ridiculous, but much less wasteful.

U.S. Virgin Islanders among us who think Smith “protesting” is bringing “awareness,” to GERS, don’t understand the taxpayer costs involved, the fiduciary responsibility associated with being an elected official, and Smith’s duty and role as a senator in the first branch of government.

U.S. Virgin Islanders elected Smith to craft legislation, and come up with ways to shore up GERS’ unfunded liability, not waste and abuse taxpayer money.

Clearly, Smith doesn’t understand that while he held that sign in protest—on the government time, and on the government dime—he was a source, vessel, and part of the problem further sinking the U.S. Virgin Islands into financial collapse.

On so many levels Smith has proven he is ill prepared to serve U.S. Virgin Islanders in the Legislature. During the Democratic Primary Election on August 4, U.S. Virgin Islands voters will take Smith’s advice to “do what they have to do, and make themselves happy,” by sending Smith home.

[Watch the original video](#)