

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Albert Bryan's Team Decides Against One-On-One Debate With Mapp

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The Albert Bryan camp, after agreeing to a VI Consortium debate between Mr. Bryan and Governor Kenneth Mapp on Wednesday -- a debate that was set to show on VI Consortium's website and Facebook platform, as well as WTJX TV Channel 12 and a number of radio stations Tuesday evening -- decided against the debate on Friday, with John Engerman, the campaign's territorial manager, telling this publication that the team had decided that Mr. Bryan would no longer participate.

Governor Kenneth Mapp had already agreed to the debate, and the community has been asking for at least one before the runoff election, which is set for November 20.

Because of the team's decision to forego the debate, The Consortium will no longer move ahead with it, as the goal of the debate was to hear Mr. Mapp and Mr. Bryan bring forth their ideas relative to who can best lead the territory for the next four years.

Friday's no-show announcement was not the first time that a planned Consortium debate had been cancelled. Last month, Mr. Mapp said he could not participate in a debate being hosted by The Consortium that included the then-six other gubernatorial candidates. Lieutenant Governor Osbert Potter said at the time that the date conflicted with a prior commitment, and that there was no way they could have participated. But their decision not to attend came late and appeared to many as Mr. Mapp simply evading participation.

Even so, because the runoff is a one-on-one battle, Virgin Islanders have been calling for the two men to set forth their plans and ideas one last time before the people of the territory, in what is being classed as one of the most critical elections in Virgin Islands history.

At stake is who is best suited to lead the territory forward with the potential of billions of dollars of federal funds flowing here post-Hurricanes Irma and Maria; who will be best suited to provide a first-rate healthcare system for Virgin Islanders; who has the best plans to grow the Virgin Islands economy, which was anemic before post-hurricane work ignited a construction boom; and which team has the best strategy to save the Government Employees' Retirement System, which will essential sink the territory's economy if allowed to crash in 2023, as projected.

Both men have laid out their plans in a number of interviews on radio, TV, webcasts, and print publications. But the territory's attention to the candidates following the general election has been heightened, and people are now more than even wanting to hear those ideas.

In a meeting discussing the debate in the Bryan campaign, team members argued whether it would be a good idea to move forward with the debate, according to at least one person with knowledge of the discussions. However, it was decided that with Mr. Bryan having the lead and momentum going into the November 20 runoff, a debate with the governor would be risky, and could potentially halt the impetus Mr. Bryan gained on the night of November 6, when it was apparent that Mr. Bryan had garnered more votes than the governor.