

The Virgin Islands Consortium

A Response To The Bryan-Roach Campaign's Statement On Debate Pullout

Opinion / **Published On November 11, 2018 09:02 PM /**

VI Consortium **November 11, 2018**



The Bryan Roach campaign, determining that their decision to pull out of a debate between Albert Bryan and Governor Kenneth Mapp organized by The Virgin Islands Consortium had created too much bad publicity, issued a statement that is contrary to what actually happened.

To be clear, The Consortium's goal in this election process, is to bring as much information as possible to the public, including holding forums and debates that we believe will help Virgin Islanders make up their minds on which candidate to support for elected office. We pride ourselves in being a balance outlet that is free from bias towards any candidate or elected official, and we are proud of our record.

We are eager to move on from this current situation, and are disappointed that we even had to issue a statement defending ourselves. However, when our credibility is on the line, the record has to be made clear.

The Bryan-Roach statement claimed that The Consortium "proposed" a date of Tuesday, November 13, for the debate. It also said that an agreement for a new date couldn't be reached "despite [the Bryan-Roach campaign's] best efforts".

The first statement is patently false. The second statement is vague in that it neglects to mention why The Consortium refused the Bryan-Roach offers of new dates.

Following the Nov. 6, General Election results, which ended with Mr. Bryan in the lead and Mr. Mapp trailing, Consortium Founder Ernice Gilbert, and John Engerman, territorial campaign manager of the Bryan-Roach team, had a conversation on the phone. During the conversation, Mr. Gilbert said he told Mr. Engerman about a debate he had planned for Tuesday night, and asked whether the Bryan-Roach team was willing to participate. Mr. Gilbert said Mr. Engerman immediately took the opportunity, stating that the Bryan-Roach team was ready to debate the issues with Governor Mapp. Mr. Engerman, Mr. Gilbert said, even requested that he be informed soon as possible as to whether the governor would participate.

Following the conversation, Mr. Gilbert then attempted to make contact with the Mapp-Potter campaign. After a series of calls and communication, the Mapp-Potter team tentatively agreed to the debate for Tuesday. Mr. Gilbert said he immediately sent a text message to Mr. Engerman, which read, "Bro, they agreed for Tuesday night." A letter was then sent to both teams thanking them for accepting to participate. It also included details about the debate, including topics that would be discussed, length of time and location.

The Mapp team had made contact seeking further information so as to prepare themselves. However, The Consortium had not yet heard from the Bryan-Roach team. On Friday, Mr. Gilbert made several unsuccessful attempts to reach Mr. Engerman. Later in the day, Mr. Engerman called to state that Mr. Bryan would no longer participate in the debate. Mr. Gilbert said according to the Wednesday conversation he had with Mr. Engerman, there was an understanding that Mr. Bryan would debate on Tuesday, if the governor had agreed.

Mr. Engerman, for his part, told The Consortium this morning that he could not recall agreeing to a debate on Tuesday, and said the campaign had a lot of work to do, especially on St. Croix, in reaching out to voters before the runoff election on November 20.

The Bryan-Roach campaign statement also said: "It appears at this time that no agreement can be reached on dates for the V.I. Consortium, despite our best efforts."

But the campaign only offered V.I. Consortium two dates to host the debate: first, they offered the night of November 19, which is the day before the runoff election and well after early voting would have been completed. And later, they offered November 18; again, a date when early voting would have already been completed.

"The reason for a debate or forum, is to give voters a chance to hear the candidates before they vote," Mr. Gilbert told The Consortium. "It simply was not acceptable to hold a debate to help voters make an informed decision, when the very purpose for which the debate is being held, would have already been over in part," he added, referring to early voting, which runs from November 17 to the 18.

Mr. Gilbert, who founded The Consortium on August 2, 2014, then a primary election day, said he has no intention of further addressing the matter, adding that he would leave it in the hands of the two gubernatorial teams. "If the teams want to debate, they should meet and workout the details. The Consortium will host it, I will moderate it, and the publication will get its partners -- WTJX TV Channel 12, along with local radios stations -- to air it live," Mr. Gilbert said.

He added, "It remains my view that a debate would be beneficial -- maybe not to either of the campaigns -- but definitely to the public, many of whom remain undecided and would like to hear the governor and Mr. Bryan address them one more time."