

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Nominees Of The Departments Of Agriculture, Health And Planning And Natural Resources Forwarded Favorably To Full Senate

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Though two of three nominees chosen by Governor Albert Bryan faced some opposition during a Committee on Rules and Judiciary hearing on Thursday, all of them -- Positive Nelson for the Department of Agriculture, Justa Encarnacion for the Department of Health, and Jean-Pierre Oriol for the Department of Planning and Natural Resources -- were given favorable nods by committee members.

Mr. Oriol, who is no stranger to D.P.N.R. [as he led it in 2014](#) following the resignation of Alicia Barnes (Ms. Barnes is now a senator and chair of the Committee on Rules and

Judiciary), was challenged following a letter from fishermen that said he was against progress at the department's fisheries arm. "In reading this thing I could swear that you don't like fishermen. They claim you were keeping funding away, stopping repair work," said Senator Oakland Benta, who also asked Mr. Oriol whether he had a prejudice against fishermen.

"People are making statements; people I've never met are making statements. It is a democratic process and they're more than welcome to come down here and put their feelings on the record," Mr. Oriol said. "I am not here passing any personal judgements on anyone, I'm just listening with a keen ear. My job here at the Dept. of Planning and Natural Resources is to ensure that we meet our mandates -- our mandates are to meet the needs those fishermen and that will be done under my leadership."

Ms. Encarnacion was on the receiving end of some pointed questions from Senator Marvin Blyden, which was a result of a meeting Mr. Blyden had with more than a dozen Department of Health employees, all of whom Mr. Blyden said criticized the commissioner nominee's leadership style. During the questioning, Ms. Encarnacion described herself as a "transformational leader," a description that was contrary to information Mr. Blyden said he had gathered.

"In those meetings they cannot bring up no issue in regards to what's going on at the department and how those issues could be addressed. I was told that in those meetings, when they're trying to make suggestions and input they're being cutoff. I mean I could go on and on and on, I have about seven pages of information I took during those meetings [when] I met with the 12-plus employees of [the Department of Health]," Mr. Blyden said. He said the employees he received complaints from ranged from the top brass to rank and file, and they painted a picture of Ms. Encarnacion as someone who silences criticism. Mr. Blyden said he would meet with both the employees and Ms. Encarnacion before voting on the commissioner nominee's nomination in the Body of the Whole.

For Mr. Nelson, a former senator, many of the questions sought to establish how he would lead the department without bias relative to medicinal marijuana, when he was the sponsor of the bill that made marijuana for medical purposes legal in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

"I do not see my serving in the capacity of commissioner of Agriculture being a conflict of interest because I was the primary sponsor of the Medicinal Cannabis Care Act," Mr. Nelson said in a response to a question posed by Ms. Barnes. "I don't see any conflict. I think I'll be able to serve without any bias."