

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Reappointment Initiative Fails As Dismal Voter Turnout Affects Outcome

Politics / **Published On March 30, 2019 11:55 PM /**

Staff **March 30, 2019**



The Reappointment Initiative spearheaded by the St. Croix Government Retirees Inc., which sought to change the way public servants are elected into office by creating districts within the three main islands of the USVI, failed to accomplish its goal, according to voter turnout data provided by the Election System of the Virgin Islands Saturday night.

The goal was nearly insurmountable to begin with: to become law, the Reapportionment Initiative needed 50 percent plus 1 of the territory's registered voters to participate. That's roughly 25,000 people. Furthermore, a majority of the 25,000 would have needed to vote in favor of the initiative. Then and only then would it become law.

The turnout needed was not even close: According to the Election System, only 4,679 people voted today and during early voting, not counting absentee ballots

Mario Moorhead, the legendary radio personality and Virgin Islands historian, who served as a pro bono consultant for the St. Croix Retirees Inc., told The Consortium's Ernice Gilbert during an interview on Wednesday, that 32nd Legislature senators, who had three options following the initiative's successful collection of requisite signatures, chose the most difficult path for the initiative. The first, he said, was to approve the petition, which collected over 8,000 signatures, as is; the second option would have seen the senators creating their own version of the initiative and approving it; or the third and hardest option of approving a special election that would require the uphill effort of getting 50 percent plus 1 of the territory's registered voters to participate. Not even the exciting runoff election saw 50 percent voter turnout.

The senators chose the latter and hence setting up the initiative for failure, Mr. Moorhead suggested.

During a Senate session when the special election was approved, senators placed on record why they supported the special election, even if it came at a cost of \$140,000 to taxpayers.

Then-Senator Tregenza Roach, now the territory's lieutenant governor, said the decision to change the current makeup of the Legislature should be placed before voters. He said additional education was needed on the potential changes.

Then-Senator Alicia Hansen, who also supported the special election, said it was important to give all Virgin Islanders a chance to be part of the change, so that "no one can say that they didn't have the opportunity to participate in that decision," she said, echoing the sentiment of Mr. Roach and other lawmakers who supported the special election bill.

The bill "gives the power to the people to go to the polls and say, 'this is what I want the makeup of the Legislature to look like,'" then-Senator Janette Millin Young said.

Senator Dwayne DeGraff said it should be noted that both the majority and minority caucuses were in support of the special election measure.

Mr. Moorhead, asked by Mr. Gilbert about next steps if the initiative failed, said he saw no reasons why the St. Croix Retirees Inc. should stop its advocacy, and deemed the distance the group took the initiative as a victory.