

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Frett-Gregory: 'This Spectacle Illustrates Why People Have Lost Confidence In Legislators'

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Senator Donna Frett-Gregory

Senator Donna Frett-Gregory has issued a statement following a successful resolution [that called for the reorganization of the Majority Caucus](#) Wednesday afternoon, which led to Mrs. Frett-Gregory losing the chairmanship of the Finance Committee along with the Senate vice president position. The reorganizing action, taken by 9 senators, also removed Senator Kenneth Gittens from his role as president of the 33rd Legislature.

Mrs. Frett-Gregory said she had heard of ramblings about restructuring, but was never made aware of it by those who eventually took the action. "They are calling for collaboration and communication but never once conversed with me," she said, revealing that though she was given the chair position for the Committee on Rules and Judiciary in the new Majority, there were no conversations with her about the new role.

"This spectacle illustrates why our people have lost confidence in our Legislators," Mrs. Frett-Gregory said. Even so, the senator vowed to continue working on behalf of Virgin Islanders, deeming the recent episode as a distraction. She pointed out that since taking office in January, she has sponsored 25 pieces of legislation, including a measure to provide financial transparency and another seeking to secure an \$80 million bond to pay local contractors.

"While we continue to face issues with rebuilding our infrastructure, health, education, and GERS— to name a few— it is unfortunate that a handful of my colleagues choose to focus on power struggles," she said.

Mrs. Frett-Gregory did not, however, mention Bill No. 33-0072, the cause of much angst and in great part what eventually led to the dismantling of the prior Majority -- although the decision for change was made long before. The senator had worked on the measure with the Bryan administration and failed to caucus with members of the Committee on Finance, according to Senator Allison DeGazon. The bill sought to use \$39.5 million received from the federal government through medicaid reimbursements following an audit, for a myriad of purposes, including paying tax refunds and buying garbage trucks for the Department of Sports, Parks and Recreation. The bill was heard in the Committee on Finance and was forwarded to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary for further vetting.

But on Tuesday, the first day of the two-day Senate session, Mrs. Frett-Gregory attempted to special-order the measure to the Senate floor. The move failed. But miles away on the sister island, employees at the Juan F. Luis Hospital were already incensed that monies sent to medical facilities -- including JFL, which is in need of everything from medical supplies to new restrooms -- were being repurposed elsewhere. These employees called The Consortium, [a video](#) of the employees expressing their grievances was published on the company's Facebook platform and has since been viewed by over 34,000 people.

The video, [a story from The Consortium that followed](#), were enough to put already frustrated senators over the edge. That afternoon, Senator Marvin Blyden made a resolution calling for the restructuring of the Senate.

Late Wednesday, leaders of the newly formed Majority issued a release with statements revealing their reasons behind the bold, historic move.

"A legislative body is a group comprised of equals," said Mr. Blyden. "It is simply unacceptable for a legislative president to make unilateral decisions regarding the legislature's direction and operations without conferring with his colleagues. In all legislative bodies, the President or Chair should be mindful of their responsibilities as a servant of the body and not its master."

“We were dissatisfied with the direction of the legislature under the former President,” said Senator Alicia Barnes, the Legislature’s new secretary. “After the first 100 days we took the opportunity to evaluate our progress, and realized that we could not move forward positively under the present leadership. For this reason, we have realigned our majority to form a group that we feel is best suited to work together for the betterment of all Virgin Islands residents. Sen. Francis has always displayed the qualities of leadership and is certainly to lead this body forward.”

“Purposeful governing is about making tough, gut wrenching decisions and it’s also about figuring out a better way to do things. It is obvious that this move is about erecting a new leadership that is productive, considers all sides of a matter and does not work in a silo. I am honored to be asked to be a part of the majority and I will remain focused on my platform and strong agenda for St. Croix as elected,” said Ms. DeGazon.

“I look forward to working with the new leadership of the 33rd Legislature of the Virgin Islands and my colleagues. The majority has spoken and it is now time for us to focus on moving the agenda of the 33rd forward. There is work to be done as we move forward in a new direction,” said Senator Javan James.

Senator Janelle Sarauw said Wednesday’s reorganization was a live demonstration of democracy in action. “The reorganization process is democratic in nature,” she stated. “The Declaration of Independence gives the people the right to alter, abolish or even institute new government. We did this today. Democracy is not finite. Rather, it is the will of the people.”

Senator Myron Jackson, the former president who now serves as vice president of the Senate, stated, “This reorganization of the 33rd comes with the understanding that the new leadership was necessary and in the best interests of the territory. I am committed to working with all of my colleagues on achieving our mandates and doing what is necessary to best represent our territory and its people.”

Senator Novelle Francis, the new Senate president, said he intends to lead the body considering the input of all members. “I was approached by my colleagues, who were frustrated by the lack of consensus building,” he said. “Leading any institution takes a team approach, not one that is focused on self. I am honored to accept this new role and expect to work with the entire body in a collaborative and purposeful manner.”