

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Gittens Concedes, Wishes New Senate President Well

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Senator Kenneth Gittens on Friday wrote Senator Novelle Francis congratulating him on his new role as Senate president, the clearest sign so far that Mr. Gittens does not wish to engage in a war for a position he was removed from following the Majority reorganizing action taken by nine of the territory's lawmakers. (See new Majority committee assignments [here](#).)

In the reorganization, Senator Kurt Violet was given the Committee on Finance chairmanship, removing Senator Donna Frett-Gregory, who also lost the Senate vice president position. Mrs. Frett-Gregory was given the Committee on Rules and Judiciary, however.

Also notable, new Majority member Janelle Sarauw was made chair of the Committee on Education (Ms. Sarauw was the only lawmaker to vote against Dept. of Education Commissioner Designee, Racquel Berry-Benjamin, during the two-day Senate session last week).

In his letter, Mr. Gittens said while he still had concerns with the process in which he was removed, he believed Mr. Francis would be a good leader. "My primary concern is that immediate steps are taken to facilitate a smooth transition process and that adequate and clear direction is provided to the legislative staff. I look forward to beginning immediate discussions with you and your team to assure that we do not lose anymore time in addressing the people's business," Mr. Gittens wrote.

He added, "Further, I trust that as Senate president you will cooperate fully with the ongoing audit of the institution and I hope that you will utilize the policies recently put in place to regulate credit card use, travel and other expenditures."

Mr. Gittens's letter followed a stinging rebuke from Majority Leader Marvin Blyden, who defended the Majority Caucus's reorganization action as legitimate after Mr. Gittens contended it wasn't.

"Nothing that was done in reorganizing the Legislature violated the laws of the Virgin Islands, as interpreted time and time again by our courts, and I challenge you to provide a single provision of the V.I. Code or the Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands in the process. Additionally, the courts have made clear that the rules of the body are separate and distinct from the law, and that when it comes to the internal operations of the Legislature, no act of a majority of members will be scrutinized or interfered with by the courts except if a violation of law, not the rules, has occurred. I refer you to *Brown v. Hansen*, *Mapp v. Lawaetz*, and *Bryan v. Liburd* as the local cases which have firmly established this principle in the territory," Mr. Blyden wrote in a response letter.