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Virgin Islanders Overwhelmingly Support Referendum Calling for Constitutional Convention

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On the ballot this year was a question asking Virgin Islanders whether they would support legislation that would authorize a constitutional convention to adopt the Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands, 68 Stat. 497, or portions of it as a Constitution for the Virgin Islands.

The Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands (R.O.A.), passed on July 22, 1954 by the U.S. Congress, acts as the basis for law in the United States Virgin Islands. Like other organic acts, it functions as a constitution for the U.S. territory.

The Revised Organic Act provides for:

- An executive branch headed by a governor elected by a majority of registered voters.

- A unicameral (single-body) legislature of 15 members, elected by the residents of the U.S. Virgin Islands. While this legislature largely creates the laws that govern the islands, the ultimate laws that govern are still those of the U.S. Congress, a body in which Virgin Islanders have no vote;
- A court system with judges appointed by the governor;
- A Bill of Rights.

The USVI has tried five times to establish a constitution but failed for a number of reasons. "One is the failure to recognize the supremacy of the U.S. Constitution, which is a Congressional requirement," said the League of Women Voters of the Virgin Islands, which is leading the movement.

"Unless the U.S. territory indicates, by a vote on political status it no longer wishes to be in union with the the U.S., our Constitution must remain subject to the U.S. Constitution," the League added.

The League said it believes if it presents Congress with a document that Congress has already approved as the territory's governing document, which is the R.O.A., the U.S. body would be more willing to accept it. But what is the benefit of Congress accepting the R.O.A. as the territory's Constitution if the R.O.A. already governs the territory? Well, the League said it would include language that would give the territory the right to amend the R.O.A. without seeking additional approval from Congress, as long as the changes recognizes the supremacy of the U.S. Constitution.

"If approved by Congress we can then amend it, making it truly our own," the League argued.

Virgin Islanders overwhelmingly supported the referendum, [with 8,320 voting yes, and 3,225 voting no.](#)