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Sarawu Stripped of Rules Committee Chair, Donna Frett-Gregory Selected President of 34th Legislature as New Democratic Majority Forms

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Ernice Gilbert **November 10, 2020**

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Sky view of the Legislature building in St. Thomas taken in May 2015. By. ERNICE GILBERT FOR VI CONSORTIUM

A 10-member Democratic majority has formed in the Senate for the upcoming 34th Legislature, with Senator Donna Frett-Gregory from the St. Thomas-St. John District being chosen as the new president, according to people with intimate knowledge of the formation. The Legislature alternates presidents every two years between districts, and the president of the current Legislature, Sen. Novelle Francis, will be vice president of the 34th, the Consortium has learned.

The architects of the new body is Senator Kenneth Gittens, who will be majority leader, and Ms. Frett-Gregory. Freshman Senator Genevieve Whitaker will hold the Senate secretary position.

A minority coalition as of Tuesday morning had not been formed.

Interestingly, Senator Janelle Sarauw — who will commence her third term in office in January — is not only not part of the majority, but the Committee on Rules and Judiciary, which she managed in an exemplary manner during the 33rd, has been stripped from her. Ms. Sarauw will be part of whatever minority coalition is formed.

Senator Kurt Vialet will retain the Committee on Finance. A source with knowledge of the formation proceedings said Mr. Vialet had rejected the majority leadership position.

Calls placed to both Gittens and Frett-Gregory — said to be the senators behind the new majority — were not returned at time of writing. Ms. Frett-Gregory is said to be heavily favored by Governor Albert Bryan as the new president.

The 2020 General Election saw Mr. Bryan losing support in the Senate, with Sen. Allison DeGazon experiencing a historic loss, going from a top vote-getter in the 2018 General Election second to only Sen. Alicia Barnes, to being voted out two years later. Ms. Barnes did not seek reelection.

In St. Thomas, two of Mr. Bryan's allies, Athneil Thomas and Stedmann Hodge, Jr., were voted out as well. All of these senators had supported Mr. Bryan's controversial debt refinancing deal. The governor urged the community to vote those who backed the plan, but his plea didn't resonate. His strong allies in the Senate are now Ms. Frett-Gregory, Mr. Francis and Mr. Blyden.

The 10-member Democratic majority in the Senate, according to sources with intimate knowledge of the formation, are as follows:

- Frett-Gregory: President
- Novelle Francis: Vice President
- Kenneth Gittens: Majority Leader
- Genevieve Whitaker: Secretary
- Marvin Blyden
- Milton Potter
- Javan James
- Kurt Vialet
- Steven Payne, Sr.
- Carla Joseph

Though a minority coalition has not been formed, the members would most likely include independent lawmakers, among them Ms. Sarauw, Alma Francis Heyliger, and Dwayne DeGraff from the St. Thomas-St. John District, and from St. Croix freshmen Samuel Carrion and Franklin Johnson.