

Dear Editor, Here are Some Ideas for the Upcoming Sixth Constitutional Convention

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Dear Editor,

Now that the Constitutional Convention Referendum passed with resounding success, what is the next step? Well, now it is up to our Senators to draft and pass legislation that would convene a sixth conventional constitution. Let me offer a few suggestions:

1. Except for special, in-person meetings, the convention can be totally virtual. Delegates can interact via Zoom, Teams, WebEx or some other internet platform that allows for full participation. As a backup, the Legislature can designate areas for internet access, computers and any resources that may be needed.

2. Next, how do we determine the amount of delegates and how they should be selected? Here are three options out of many available reasonable approaches for the composition of the delegates.
- a. This proposal favors electing a majority of the delegates. However, delegates could be appointed or chosen by a different method established by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands. Because of the importance of this endeavor, delegates should secure their place in history via popular vote.
 - b. Delegate composition #1. Thirty-five delegates comprising thirty-two delegates elected by the voters of the Virgin Islands and three appointed delegates, one from each branch of government. The elected delegates are divided into district delegates and at-large delegates. The twenty-six district delegates would be selected from the thirteen designated polling places in the Virgin Islands. The six at-large delegates are divided equally between the two districts in the Virgin Islands. Three must be a resident of St. Croix and three must be a resident of St. Thomas/St. John. Each island district will select three at large delegates respectively. Each polling place would elect one delegate for a total of thirteen from the district. To run you must be registered to vote in a particular polling place and you would have to be elected in a plurality vote for the district.
 - c. Delegate composition #2. Twenty-nine delegates consisting of three appointed from each branch of government. Each polling place would elect one delegate for a total of twenty-six delegates elected from the polling site.
 - d. Delegate composition #3. Thirty-three delegates with three appointed from each branch of government. Delegates would be elected on a plurality vote where the highest number of vote-getters reaching fifteen would qualify to serve as a delegate to the 6th Constitutional Convention.
3. This proposal envisions passage of a law during the current lame duck session. Senators who voted for the initial measure would have an opportunity to be part of the legislation forming the 6th Constitutional Convention. This process envisions an election on March 31st with a convention to convene soon after the election.
4. The financial aspect of the convention would be based on equal contributions from each branch of government to the 6th Constitutional Convention fund. This would mean the Legislature would have to adjust the budgets of each branch of government accordingly. Each branch would need to contribute at least \$150,000 to make at least \$450,000 available to the convention when needed. If more money is needed for a public education campaign, research and expert guidance and miscellaneous expenses such as food, drink, internet service, etc., the delegates would have to identify the expense and cost and present it to the Legislature's Finance Committee for appropriation.
5. Money to the Election System: Since the legislation requires all polling centers to be open, money to the Election System of the Virgin Islands should be comparable to the money for a general election in the territory.
6. This law should recognize that portions of the Revised Organic Act (ROA) can be used as a template along with the other constitutional drafts or documents that were not adopted. The legislation used to convene the 5th Constitutional Convention is a good template for the 33rd Legislature to use when drafting this legislation. A 6th Constitutional Convention is needed for our territory to move forward in the pursuit of more self-determination.

Submitted last week by: Ronald Russell, a USVI attorney and former senator.

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