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James Leaves Democratic Party and Newly Formed Majority, Portending 'Turmoil and Chaos'; Gittens Will No Longer Be Majority Leader

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Senator Javan James during a Sports, Parks and Recreation Committee Hearing in Oct. 2020. By. THE LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

The newly formed Senate majority of the incoming 34th Legislature, announced Monday by Senator Kenneth Gittens, has already seen impactful disruptions even though the body has not officially organized. In its release, the incoming Senate Majority of Democrats [announced it had 10 members](#), which at the time included Senator Javan James. Additionally, Mr. Gittens was set to serve as majority leader and Senator Donna Frett-Gregory as Senate president.

But Mr. James, in a statement on Facebook and on a call with the Consortium Saturday, confirmed that he had left the majority and the Democratic Party to become an independent lawmaker. And sources with knowledge of the formation proceedings told the Consortium that Mr. Gittens, who had not left the party, would no longer serve as majority leader; the position, sources say, will be held by Senator Marvin Blyden, who also served as majority leader in the 33rd Legislature.

The 34th Legislature will be sworn in on Monday.

"After careful consideration with my confidants and advisors, I have decided to switch to an independent (No Party)," Mr. James [wrote on Facebook](#). "During my tenure as a freshman Senator, I have served with pride and honor as a member of two majorities in the 33rd Legislature of the Virgin Islands. However, it came with a lot of ups and downs as I was a part of two changes of the Democratic majority. A lot of challenges came as a result of those significant changes in the Senate."

Mr. James told the Consortium that he was looking to the future and decided it was best to leave the party. "I am a man who always deal with futuristic thinking; I don't want to be a part of that drama," Mr. James said. The senator said he had a "gut feeling" the 34th Legislature's majority will have "turmoil and chaos," adding, "I rather stay no party, independent."

The senator recalled the shakeup early during the 33rd Legislature, which saw Senators Frett-Gregory, who had held the Senate Committee on Finance chair, and Gittens, who was Senate president, being overthrown [in a bold reorganizational move](#). Mr. James said the situation worked out well with Senator Novelle Francis at the helm as Senate president, however he did not believe the current body would be so fortunate.

"We are now saying fast forward to a year and couple months later that individuals that have served in both of those majorities are going to be in a kumbaya moment and everything is going to go well? Let's be real," Mr. James said. "So I predict that it will not work out, and if it does work out, well, God help them and may God continue to bless them. But I strongly and firmly believe that after speaking to my confidants and advisors, that serving in the capacity as an independent senator, that I will be able to serve my district and the people of the Virgin Islands better without any challenges and distractions from a Democratic majority."

Pressed to provide clarity on whether there were disagreements amongst members, Mr. James stated, "[There are] people right now in the current majority that are thinking of doing something else, and I will leave it at that. And I'm very aware of that. And you will hear that my change is not the only change; expect another change when it comes to the formation of the majority."

Mr. James said the majority "might lose another member, and a member serving in the capacity of an officer position will be relinquishing that position." He added, "There's a lot of things that are going on internally and I really don't want to put that out on the forefront, but it will play out for itself."

Mr. James's decision to join the minority gives the smaller, independent caucus a 6-member team, leaving the majority with 9 members.

Attempts to reach Mr. Gittens Saturday were unsuccessful. Ms. Frett-Gregory would not comment on matters concerning Mr. Gittens, only stating, "The Legislature will be organized on Monday, and at that time the community will get all the information around the organization of the Legislature." Asked why an official press release was issued with Mr. Gittens as the majority leader, Ms. Frett-Gregory said, "Legislatures change all the time for varying reasons. This is

always a fluid situation. We will organize our Legislature come Monday and I think it is important for the community to allow us to organize the Legislature. The Legislature shall be organized from the inside out."

Asked about Mr. James's decision to leave the Democratic party and the 34th Legislature's majority, which Ms. Frett-Gregory is set to lead, Ms. Frett-Gregory said while she saw Mr. James's post on Facebook, he had not spoken to her directly on the matter. "Senators are duly elected and they have an option to decide what side of the aisle they choose to be on," she said. "Javan is an adult and if he chooses to make a decision, I respect his decision."

Even with the early changes, Ms. Frett-Gregory expressed an immovable determination to remain focused on what she said would be solving problems facing the people of the territory. "All of us know that there is much work to do, so all the other little feelings and different things" were irrelevant, she said.

"Bring me good trouble, let's talk about good trouble," Ms. Frett-Gregory continued, referring to the challenges facing the territory and its people. "Let's talk about good legislation that we're putting forward and we don't agree, and we work so we agree and rise up and bring something good that is helpful to the people. But that other stuff, I'm not dealing with it."