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Members of the 34th Legislature Take Oath of Office in Territory's Capital

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After being sworn in, members of the 34th Legislature of the USVI pose on the steps of the gazebo at Emancipation Garden. By. KYLE MURPHY/VI CONSORTIUM

ST. THOMAS — On Monday morning members of the 34th Legislature of the U.S. Virgin Islands were sworn into their elected positions during an Oath of Office ceremony at Emancipation Garden on St. Thomas.

Members of the lawmaking body that were sworn in were: Marvin A. Blyden, Samuel Carrion, Dwayne M. Degraff, Novelle E. Francis, Alma Francis Heyliger, Donna A. Frett-Gregory, Kenneth L. Gittens, Javan E. James Sr, Franklin D. Johnson, Carla J. Joseph, Steven D. Payne Sr, Milton E. Potter, Janelle K Sarauw, Kurt A. Violet and Genevieve R. Whitaker.

The results of the elections were confirmed by Supervisor of Elections Caroline F. Fawkes before the new senators were sworn in by Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands, Rhys S. Hodge, in front of their families, staff members and members of the media.

Attendance for the ceremony was limited to ascertain that Covid-19 guidelines were strictly followed. Those in attendance had their temperatures checked, wore masks and all chairs were spaced 6 ft. apart.

After they were sworn in, the senators went across the street to the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall to confirm the Organization of the 34th Legislature of the USVI.

Each member of the 34th Legislature was allowed three minutes of time to speak, with members choosing to thank the people that helped them get elected including family, friends and supporters, while also congratulating their new colleagues.

The session then went into recess until after the State of Territory address, and body will vote on the rules of the 34th Legislature after that speech.

In the program provided to those in attendance, Governor Albert Bryan, Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach, Virgin Islands Delegate to Congress Stacey E. Plaskett, Chief Justice Hodge, outgoing Senate President Francis, Jr. and incoming Senate President Frett-Gregory wrote letters to the now confirmed 15 senators. All the messages were congratulatory.

Ms. Frett-Gregory's message stated, "It is an honor and privilege to serve not only as your Senator but as your Presiding Officer of the 34th Legislature." She will be the third female Senate president in history of the USVI.

Ms. Frett-Gregory spoke about some of her goals for the 34th Legislature which included building on the momentum of the 33rd Legislature and continuing to put the people of the Virgin Islands first.

"We must also ensure that we push legislation that has a meaningful impact on our entire community. It is critical that we double down on our efforts to address G.E.R.S. [the Government Employees' Retirement System], education reform, economic development, crime and healthcare," she said.

In conclusion, Ms. Frett-Gregory stated, "The fight is far from over - I see a brighter Virgin Islands in our future. A Virgin Islands where everyone can make a decent living and where everyone has the opportunity to pursue their dreams. Together as one Virgin Islands, we will move this Territory forward."

The outgoing president and the vice-president of the 34th Legislature, Mr. Francis, said, "It has been the honor of my lifetime to serve. I thank my colleagues for their support and look forward to our continued collaboration in service to the people of the Virgin Islands."

Governor Bryan's message to the newly elected body read, "While the challenges that lie ahead are significant, I am confident in the ability of this body and that of our administration to make a positive impact while confronting these challenges."

Mr. Roach's message expressed a willingness to work with the legislature. "I look forward to working with each of you as we forge a way ever forward and as we navigate away to success which brings the greatest good to our people and home."

Ms. Plaskett touched on the values needed to be a successful elected official in her message. She said, “We live in challenging times that require commitment, humility and excellence as we honor those who have paved the way ahead of us while looking for new creative ideas to propel us into the future. The people of the Virgin Islands need strong leadership.” The delegate to Congress also pledged her support by stating, “As the elected official in the nation’s Legislature, you will always have me as a partner.”

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