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Board of Elections Refers Matter Involving Republican Party to Attorney General; Board to Educate Public on Updates to Voting Machines, Name Change From 'Precincts' to 'Election Centers'

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Virgin Islanders voting early on St. Croix during the 2020 elections. By. ERNICE GILBERT/ V.I. CONSORTIUM

Members of the V.I. Board of Elections have agreed to forward a matter concerning and relating to the V.I. Republican Party 2022 caucus to the Attorney General's Office for an opinion.

B.O.E. Chairman Raymond Williams made the disclosure after board members met in an executive session on Wednesday. That session was not originally on the agenda, but a motion was

moved by one of the members who felt that it was a legal matter that should not be discussed publicly.

“We by motion add an executive session to the agenda; we met briefly in executive session. While in executive session no decisions were made, the executive session surrounds concerns relating to the Virgin Islands Republican Party 2022 caucus and the rules of that caucus, etc,” Mr. Williams said without revealing who filed the matter with the board.

Board member Barbara Jackson-McIntosh moved a motion to send the matter to the Attorney General's Office for an opinion.

The caucus was conducted in late March 2022 by the Republican National Committee, after years of legal wrangling by local Republicans to remove former territorial chair John Canegata. By then, the party had fallen into somnolence, having failed to nominate candidates for three congressional election cycles in a row. The RNC stepped in to organize this year's caucus, warning Canegata not to obstruct efforts or face legal action.

At the caucus, Gordon Ackley won the election for party chair, since Canegata failed to file, and caucus rules prohibited the consideration of write-in ballots.

Political newcomer Antoinette Gumbs-Hecht was the top vote-getter in the caucus to reconstitute the territorial Republican Party while incumbent National Committeeman Jevon O.A. Williams defeated former-V.I. Public Service Commissioner Johann (John) Clendenin 88 percent to 12 percent.

During the meeting, the board members also agreed that it will embark on a series of town hall meetings sometime in June to educate the public on updates to voting machines, the changing of the precincts to election centers, and boost registration among the elderly and persons who are in jail pending they meet the criteria for them to participate in the voting process.

Mr. Williams informed members that through a series of maintenance, all express voting machines were updated to version 6200. This version allows for many candidates to be visible on the screen in multi-contest on a single screen.

Supervisor of Elections Caroline Fawkes explained that in instances where there were multiple candidates in the previous version, sometimes half was showing on the first page and then the voter would have to press next to get to the other candidates.

“So for this upgrade, all names for any one contest will be on one page and so they (voters) will have the opportunity to do the selection upfront instead of having to go to next, next, next,” she said. After providing that explanation, Mr. Williams said the issue had been a concern for past elections.

“Now this is going to help us in so many different ways,” he told board members.

As part of its educational outreach, the board agreed that a letter will be sent to the Bureau of Corrections to engage in information sharing about the voting rights of people in jail. Senior citizens and the elderly will also be targeted during the educational series. Besides face-to-face sessions, the board will also be using all avenues of communication including social media, radio, television, and newspapers.

