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Vialet Announces Bid for Governor With Running Mate Sarauw, Saying Only Few Have Benefited From Bryan Administration

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Senators Kurt Vialet and Janelle Sarauw announced their bid for governor and lieutenant governor of the U.S. Virgin Islands on Thursday, May 5 2022. By. GEORGE ARMSTRONG (KGP)

In a room that eventually became filled with hundreds of supporters, senators Kurt Vialet and Janelle Sarauw, running to become the 10th elected governor and 13th elected lieutenant governor of the USVI respectively, on Thursday made their case to Virgin Islanders, contending that the Bryan administration has not made substantial progress on issues pertinent to residents, and that those who have benefited are those in the governor's circle.

Standing at a podium erected on a stage at Blue Bambou (formerly the New Drive Inn located in Grove on St. Croix), Mr. Violet spoke of what he said was the poor state of the territory's education system, health care, and stalled disaster recovery. He chided the governor for attempting to make his own what Mr. Violet said were combined legislative and executive branch efforts, the most important of those items being the Government Employees' Retirement System measure that essentially staved off collapse of the pension system.

The event, carried live on the Consortium, at press time had over 8,000 views on the publication's [Facebook page](#). Multiple radio stations also brought the announcement event over the airwaves, giving the Violet-Sarauw candidacy wide coverage while reaching various demographics.

"The process of voting that takes place every two years is one of the most important fundamental rights that is afforded to us as citizens," Mr. Violet said. "This year we can decide who will be the next governor, and I ask you that you don't take that decision lightly."



An educator for many years, Mr. Vialet honed in on education, asking his audience, "Are we pleased with our public education system and the condition of our schools?" He then stated, "My Answer is no. If I am elected governor, Senator Sarauw and I will address the infrastructure of schools as well as the learning loss of our students by creating afterschool and summer programs utilizing federal funds. Mr. Vialet spoke of creating a magnet high school on St. John that would also attract students from St. Thomas and hence address the matter of overpopulation. He further stated that he would reassess the closure of multiple schools across the territory. "Fortunately, we have \$200 million sitting in Education right now to start the process," he said. "Education is the basis of any society being successful; it is an important part of our economic development and our ability to decrease social ills. Without education our society cannot flourish and grow."

Addressing Mr. Bryan directly, Mr. Vialet stated, "Governor, you have failed at education. However, I understand. I truly understand because publicly the governor said he really knows nothing about education."

On healthcare, the same disapproving response was given when the senator asked whether residents were satisfied with the current situation. Referring to [JFL North](#), the temporary hospital that was built to facilitate health care on St. Croix because of extensive damage the main facility sustained from Hurricane Maria, Mr. Vialet said, "Our hardened modular units, at a cost of over \$100 million sits at the Juan F. Luis Hospital fully furnished, and despite being completed at the end of 2020 has still not opened. We have heard so many different opening dates that our people have lost hope."

The senator said the Charlotte Kimelman Cancer Institute on St. Thomas — the only radiation facility in the USVI — has been closed since 2017. "If you don't have money to leave this island, you just don't get radiation and that is sad," he said. Mr. Vialet also spoke about the state of the Myrah Keating Smith Community Health Center on St. John, which he said is currently limited in services and is now located in trailers.

"Senator Sarauw and I will immediately meet with all local and federal partners to create an expedited plan with justification to complete these projects," he said. "There is no way that as a government we cannot create an argument as to the importance of returning healthcare to the Virgin Islands."

Mr. Vialet spoke about the [EnVision Tomorrow Program](#), designed to assist homeowners and landlords whose properties were heavily damaged by the 2017 hurricanes, and said it "sits in limbo for the past two years." He added, "Surprisingly, the contractor that had oversight of the program was terminated last year after we paid them more than \$8 million in management fees for less than 15 homes completed."

The senator said over 700 homes are waiting to be repaired and over \$200 million has been set aside to fund the program. "When elected governor, we will focus on getting this program going," he said.

Mr. Vialet applauded the Dept. of Health for its efforts relative to Covid-19, but he said D.O.H. cannot focus only on the coronavirus, pointing to other issues such as mental health. "We have over \$8 million to address mental health, to include the refurbishment of Anna's Hope," Mr. Vialet said, adding that he and Sarauw would be very creative in how they address this problem if elected.

The senator further stated, "After highlighting those basic, everyday issues, one would ask what has gone wrong in the Virgin Islands that in so many different areas things are just not working. It has led me to the following conclusion that I have heard on the streets of the territory: has Change Course Now lost their map? Or perhaps WAPA turned off the GPS? Others have said that perhaps the Change Course team are not good managers, or simply does not know how to drive.

"They have not yet realized that the Virgin Islands is still in park after the people were told that they would change course."

Mr. Vialet, who has served six consecutive terms as chairman of the Committee on Finance, said to those who may be concerned about his departure from the Legislature that the governor of the Virgin Islands sends the annual budget to the Senate. "My expertise in this area would not leave the people of the territory in park," he said.

Ms. Sarauw, Mr. Vialet's running mate, spoke passionately about the territory, a love for which she said caused her to seek public office. Having served three terms as a lawmaker, Ms. Sarauw believes it is time to seek higher office to broaden her impact. She echoed many of the items Mr. Vialet spoke about, and said the Vialet-Sarauw team would ensure that good governance is the norm and not sporadic efforts "only in election years."

She added, "I realize that I'm not your average politician, especially one who is on the second-highest ticket for office in our land. I am young, a millennial, I have locs, I am filled with tattoos and I live a very unapologetic life. I speak directly and to the point. I am not always politically correct, and I am not always diplomatic. However, the prevailing trait is that I have this sacrificial, deep and abiding agape-type love for my home. I am well educated, I am prepared to serve, I am full of purpose, I am qualified, I am ready for this forward movement, I am ready to be your next lieutenant governor of the Virgin Islands of the United States."

The Vialet-Sarauw team is running for governor and lieutenant as independents, though both have been Democrats.

The Bryan-Roach team will announce their decision to seek reelection on Tuesday, May 10th, and the event will be carried live on the Consortium.