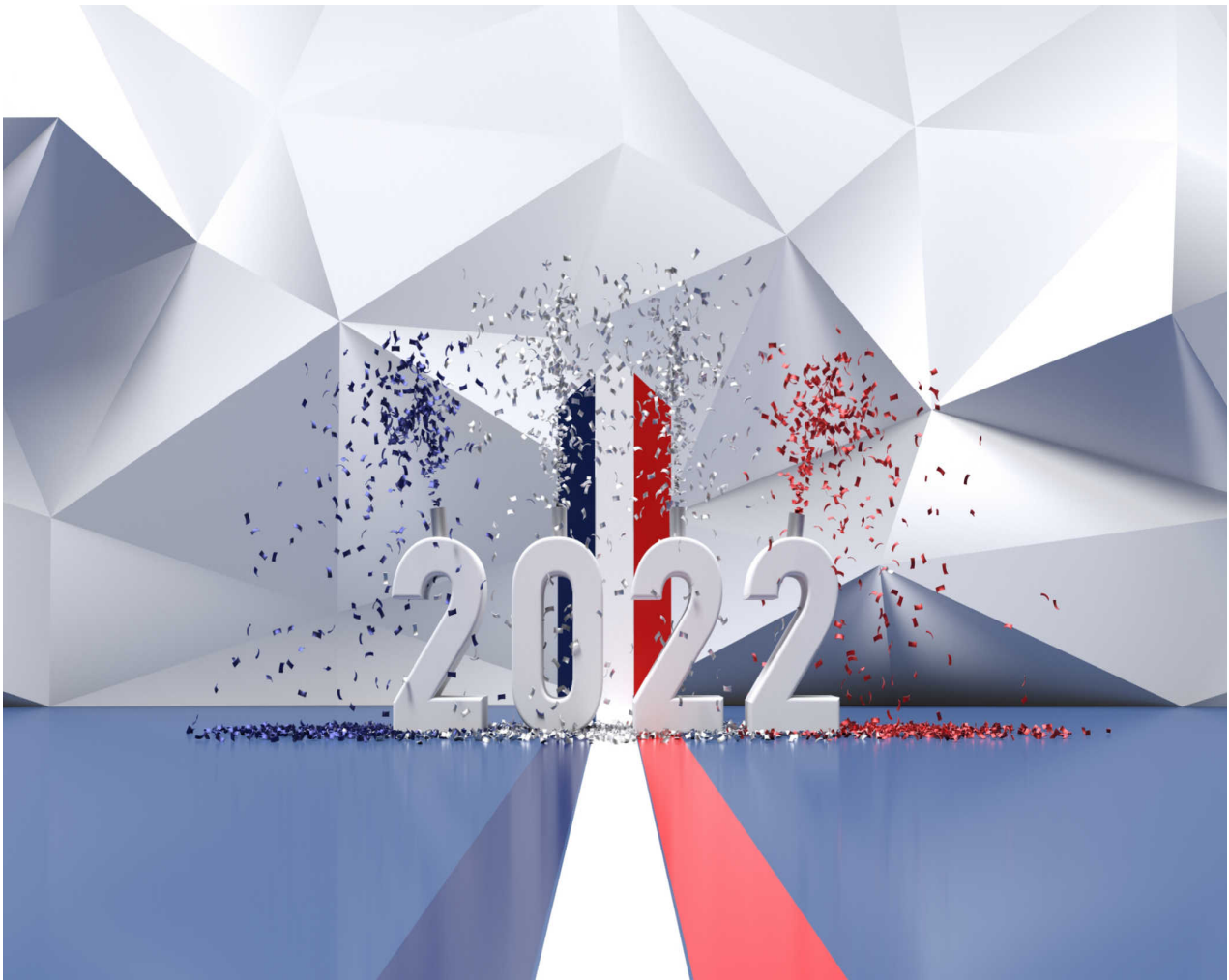


The Virgin Islands Consortium

Democrats Vying for Seat in 35th Legislature Make Their Case During Forum Ahead of August 6 Primary Election

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The Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands continued to brand themselves as the best candidates to govern the U.S. Virgin Islands during the democrats' senatorial forum on Thursday night.

Nine of the 11 democratic candidates vying for a seat in the Senate fielded questions regarding their positions on reopening of the St. Croix oil refinery, hardships brought on

by economic uncertainty, and the future of tourism and education in the territory – all hot button topics in an inflationary climate.

Javan James had strong crowd support at the event. “Being a successful senator speaks to consensus. It’s not about I, it’s about building consensus [because] you can have the greatest idea in the world but if you can’t get those guys in there to agree with you, you’re going to be very upset,” he said.

Mr. James had announced [he would not seek reelection](#), saying he needed to spend more time with his family. Three weeks later, however, the senator did an about turn and [announced that he would indeed run for reelection](#).

Senator Genevieve Whitaker is also seeking re-election in the 35th Legislature. She currently serves as chair of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development. “I’m working to restore the youth Commission, I helped to restore the youth Senate, drove that home, because I believe in our youth,” she said in her closing remarks.

Mr. James and Ms. Whitaker, however, have to contend with the likes of Hubert Frederick, whose articulate responses stimulated applause when he addressed health care and the serious and topical issue of behavioral and mental health, highlighting the need for leaders to stick to policies long enough to see impact.

“We don’t have any consistency in application of policies. They don’t stick around long enough to see if they even work and the ones that do, they’re not monitored,” Mr. Frederick said.

“We currently don’t have the statistics to determine if anything works because we don’t gather statistics for these programs – we need to. Mental health will continue to be a problem if we don’t address it correctly,” he explained.

Having served as deputy commissioner of the V.I. Dept. of Health in 2006 and having had experience as an assistant director for a mental institution, Mr. Frederick said he once proposed that phase 2 of a mental health residential unit be moved from St. Thomas to St. Croix and although his idea was ultimately accepted, he said when he left the position his decision to move the unit was reverted.

“They reverted that commitment to move that unit to St. Croix and they built two and three on St. Thomas. We still don’t have a residential unit for behavioral health on St. Croix,” he asserted.

With that in mind, Mr. Frederick gave a commitment to work with his colleagues, if elected, to push for sustainable policies that can be measured for effectiveness.

Also addressing the topic of healthcare was Senate candidate Troy Williams, who said he would advocate for hospital staff to get better support and better remuneration by appropriating funds for salary increases. “The first problem we run into is lack of morale,” he said, adding that “a lot of the employees of our hospitals in our health care systems, they feel like they’re underserved. They’re busting their tails; they’re not really getting the accolades that they need.”

Candidate Nemmy Jackson's remarks on health care also centered around incentives like living benefits, and housing for nurses to remain in the Virgin Islands healthcare system.

Candidate Marise James's applause came for her answers on questions geared toward the state of education, when she suggested that non-school factors should be considered to improve a student's outcome on standardized tests. She proposed that all children be given access to comprehensive early education, asserting that "a teacher can be ready to teach but a child has to be ready to learn."

Both former senator Diane Capehart, and Angel Bolques Jr. – a former educator in the territory who is running for the senator-at-large seat — turned their attention toward education.

Mr. Bolques supported technology in schools and having the proper tools for students to succeed, while Ms. Capehart petitioned for more money to be offered to teachers in a bid to reduce shortages and increase retention in the school system.

All candidates were asked specific questions in the first round, were given an opportunity to answer the moderator's wild card questions in the second round and received questions from the patrons present in the third round.

Candidates Kenneth Gittens and Senator Novelle Francis, both current senators, were both absent from the forum. The event was moderated by Jed JohnHope.

The Democratic Party's Primary Election will occur on August 6, while the general election will be held on November 8.