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## 35th Legislature Senators Commence 2-Year Term Following Swearing-In Ceremony

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**Members of the 35th Legislature at a church service as part of their swearing-in ceremony on Jan. 9, 2023. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE**

Newly elected senators of the 35th Legislature of the U.S. Virgin Islands took the oath of office on Monday, following two successive church services as part of the activities to mark their induction into the highest territorial legislative body.

The senators include new faces like Ray Fonseca and Marise James, as well as the return of representative Dianne Capeheart, a St. Croix senator who had spent one term in office and [was voted out in 2014](#).

Ms. Capeheart and Ms. James replaced former Sens. Kurt Violet and Genevieve Whitaker, while Fonseca replaced Sen. Janelle Sarauw. Mr. Violet and Ms. Sarauw had chosen to run as candidates in the gubernatorial race on November 8 and lost to Governor Albert Bryan.



From left to right, 35th Legislature female lawmakers Marise James, Diane Capehart, Carla Joseph, Donna Frett-Gregory and Alma Francis Heyliger. (Credit: V.I. Legislature)

Angel Bolques Jr. won the close at-large race against Sherry-Ann Francis. Mr. Bolques was appointed to senator in the 34th Legislature [following the expulsion of embattled Senator Steven Payne Sr.](#)

See the full list of senators below:

**Senator-at-Large** – Angel Bolques Jr.

**St. Thomas-St John Senators:**

Marvin Blyden, Dwayne M. Degraff, Ray Fonseca, Alma Francis Heyliger, Donna Frett Gregory, Carla Joseph, Milton Potter

**St. Croix Senators:**

Dianne Capehart, Samuel Carrion, Novelle E. Francis Jr., Kenneth Gittens, Javan James, Marise James, Franklin D. Johnson

**Independent Senators:**

Dwayne M. Degraff, Alma-Francis Heyliger, Franklin D. Johnson, Samuel Carrion

Supervisor of Elections Caroline Fawkes confirmed the senators' election on Monday morning saying their appointments were determined by “all valid votes cast.”

The song “Valiant Virgin Isles” by Gylchris Sprauve and the traditional “call of the conch shell” by Jason Meade prefaced the recessional match that closed the official swearing-in ceremony.

On the sidelines of the ceremony, four-term Senator Mr. Degraff said he felt “eager to work” and will continue to mentor the less experienced representatives.

Mr. Bolques, who will begin his first elected term this year said the experience is much different than when he was initially sworn-in to serve.

“Before it was just like it was two-twos and we were out of there in the chambers. But now it’s such a long process. However, I love it because I’m able to dialogue with the people that I meet in addition to the clergy that always has a good message for the incoming senators,” he explained.

He said he is ready to remove his "training wheels" and is grateful for the events that brought him to the forefront.

Newcomer Ms. James said her focus will be on improving education within the territory as chairperson on the Committee on Education.

Meanwhile, the other fresh senator, Mr. Fonseca who once campaigned as an independent candidate, said on Monday that he was “always a Democrat” with “democratic values,” responding to a question about whether he had to change any of his values to run on a democratic ticket this time around.

A post-swearing-in Ecumenical Service is expected be held on Wednesday, January 11, at 10:00 a.m. at the City of Refuge Worship Center on St. Croix. It will be followed by a meet and greet at

12:00 p.m. at the Anne E. Abramson Pier in Frederiksted.

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