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Slightly Rocky Start for 35th Legislature as Francis Heyliger Measure to Form Committee With Independent Senators is Voted Down

Government / **Published On January 24, 2023 06:35 AM /**

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Senator Alma Francis Heyliger. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

The first sitting of the 35th Legislature got off to a less than favorable start when several senators voted against an amendment, a move that Senator Alma Francis Heyliger said was “erasing the minority caucus.”

Ms. Francis Heyliger was attempting to form a committee with three other independent candidates – Dwayne Degraff, Franklin Johnson and Samuel Carrion.

“When you guys attempted or just changed the rules again you basically erased the Minority Caucus which was already in existence,” she said.

According to Ms. Francis Heyliger, a precedent was previously established in the 34th Legislature to recognize the right of the Minority to form a caucus.

Her amendment to strike the word "of" and replace it with the words "not less than" in the bill was seconded by Senator Degraff and Johnson but was objected to by Senator Kenneth Gittens.

Only four of the 14 senators present voted in favor of the change.

Senators Gittens, Marvin A. Blyden, Angel Bolques Jr., Diane T. Capehart, Novelle E. Francis Jr., Ray Fonseca, Sr., Marise C. James, Carla Joseph and Milton Potter voted against the amendment.

Senator Javan James Sr. abstained, and Senator Samuel Carrion was absent from the vote.

Ms. Francis Heyliger said those who opposed the technical amendment to change Bill No. 35-0002, a resolution adopting the Rules of the 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, was causing lawmakers to begin “in a very divisive and combative manner.”

The senators however did manage to all agree to vote to approve the V.I. Agricultural Plan which is expected to improve food security by increasing agriculture productivity, sustainability, and profitability in the territory.

Mr. Gittens noted that the plan, once accepted by Governor Bryan, should focus on crop and livestock production which should result in reduced food prices.

Senator Fonseca said it has the ability to impact the lives of 425 employees at the University of the Virgin Islands who did not receive a 3 percent cost of living increase.

Senator Carla Joseph is also hopeful that the plan will improve access to water, lands and good roads in the St Thomas/St. John district.