

The statement of Attorney General Claude Earl Walker on the preliminary injunction filed to prevent the registration of voters for the run-off

This morning, I filed an action for declaratory and injunctive relief in the Superior Court to prohibit a faction within the Territorial Board of Elections from registering new voters for the November 20th run-off election, for which early voting will commence on Saturday, November 17th.

I sought to enjoin a small dissenting group of the board to enforce well-established local election law, as Virgin Islands election laws make clear that no person may register 30 days immediately preceding and five days immediately following each general election. Therefore, the board cannot legally register new voters today for an election to be held within four days.

All of the board members on St. Croix have accepted my opinion issued this past Saturday. As a result, no registration will take place on St. Croix, and at least two members from the St. Thomas/St. John district, Harriet Mercer and Max Schanfarber, are also in agreement. I have also been contacted by many in our community to express their concern, including the former V.I. Delegate to Congress, Honorable Donna Christensen, who has stated, "The St. Thomas Board thinks they are above the law! They should not be allowed to register new voters."

Despite my advice to the board, today we learned that a few members of the board intends to proceed with registration of new voters in the St. Thomas/St. John district. However, to comply with the law, the board of elections needs sufficient time, as prescribed by law, to review each and every new voter application for eligibility to maintain the utmost integrity of the run-off election.

Consequently, a real concern is that to try to register new voters now, including on Friday, November 16th, the day before early voting commences on Saturday, November 17th, could unintentionally turn this registration drive into one big fraud magnet, whereby a caravan of ineligible voters could appear at board locations on St. Thomas and St. John to register.

Ironically, the board's chairman, Arturo Watlington, Jr., Esq., stated in today's news that registration must continue because "[t]his is America, not Bosnia where we try to restrict people from voting." Bosnia is part of the Balkans which has been torn apart by religious and ethnic divisions for centuries. Having one set of rules for voters in the St. Thomas/St. John district and another for St. Croix would only lead to division, fragmentation and balkanization of the U.S. Virgin Islands –the very situation that Chairman Watlington has stated that he does not accept.

The Legislature created the Territorial Board of Elections, so that we may finally have uniformity in the electoral process.