

[The Pointer Sisters' "Yes We Can Can" plays]

>> Now's the time for all good men to get together with one another.

We got to iron out our problems and iron out our quarrels and try to live as brothers.

And try to find peace within without stepping on one another. And do respect the women of the world.

Remember you all have mothers. We got to make this land a better land than the world in which we live.

And we got to help each man be a better man with the kindness that we give.

I know we can make it.

I know that we can.

I know darn well we can work it out.

>> Good morning, good morning, good morning, Virgin Islands, and welcome to "Ability Radio -- You and Your Life," broadcasting from Da Vybe radio station, 107.9 FM on St. Croix.

My name is Iris Bermudez, and I'm very proud to be your hostess this morning, and we'll probably be hearing from our compatriots Archie Jennings and Julien Henley, and, unfortunately, Attorney LaMont is not here with us this morning, as she is working on another project.

Please note the opinions expressed on "Ability Radio -- You and Your Life" are those of the Disability Rights Center of the Virgin Islands and those of the guests.

"Ability Radio" is a live call-in show, and we encourage the listening audience to call 340-713-1079.

With us today again is none other than John Abramson, who is a former supervisor of the Virgin Islands Election System and is also a parliamentarian.

Good morning, John, and, again, welcome to "Ability Radio -- You and Your Life."

>> Morning, Miss Iris, and good morning to the listening audience.

Thanks for having me again.

I really appreciate coming on and speaking with you guys.

Today's gonna be a good day.

>> It is gonna be a good day.

[Laughs]

We are pleased to have him with us today as we approach or as we are into, now, this election cycle and are hopefully done with the hurricane cycle.

>> I'd like the second to be more important than the first.

[Laughs]

>> [Laughs]

Yes, yes, yes, yes.

John, the last time you were with us, in February, we spoke about putting on some armor, and we might be in a tough position during the election months.

Well, here we are in the election months.

How well are we prepared this election cycle?

>> I think this election cycle, from all I've seen so far, has been executed pretty well.

I give Ms. Caroline Fawkes, the present supervisor of elections, a pretty good grade in terms of preparatory activity.

As you know, today, October 6th, is the last day for voter registration for any elector that would like to take place in the November 6th election.

It's actually 30 days prior to the election.

And additionally, just to give them a few props, the Elections System is having an expo today in the Sunny Isles parking lot.

>> Yes.

>> It's starting at 9:00 until 3:00.

And anybody that's not registered, I urge you to go up

and do so.

But, overall, I think we're very well prepared.

One of my concerns for this election cycle has been the, uh...campaign participation. I recently went to a forum night before last at the Reading Rainbow, sponsored by the SIU. And I don't know.

I kind of felt that the people that needed to hear the candidates weren't there.

There were a lot of supporters there for each candidate, but that's like preaching to the choir, because I think everybody that was in the room already knew who they wanted to support.

>> Right.

>> I'm concerned that the message of the candidates isn't getting to the individuals that we need to get that message to.

>> Right.

>> And I just think that the candidates have to do a little more to get outside of their comfort zone.

It's good to have people cheer when you make a statement, and it's good to have your cheering squad, but we need more than just a cheering squad to get elected.

>> Yeah, and that was gonna be one of our questions to you about how do we get the young generation out there to really understand the issues and then to vote intellectually or, you know, knowing.

>> Knowledgeable as possible.

>> Knowledgeable. Right.

But where we're looking at maybe -- what, the elderly, middle-aged people that need to really get out there?

>> One of the things that I would suggest, and we had done this in the past, which really, really worked for us, is that we actually went through the list and pulled up all the voters

that were between 18 and 23.
>> Okay.
>> We tried to peer them,
because our greatest voting
group is those 50 and above.
>> 50 and above, yes.
>> So, we kind of established --
We wrote to about 20 people and
basically said to 20
individuals, "This is your chore
for the day.
You're assigned these particular
seniors, and you're to see to it
that they get to the polls.
And you're also assigned a peer
that you need to get to the
polls."
And that was something that kind
of worked for us because seniors
are gonna vote, and they
encouraged the people that were
driving them because it was
really a pickup program.
That's basically what it was.
And they'd pick up seniors and
take them to the polls, and
while they took them to the
polls, they had to take a peer
to the poll and get them to
vote.
We really don't have problems
getting our young people
registered.
They always come in for the I.D.
It's free.
It allows them now to go and buy
liquor and go into nightclubs
and do all the things as an
adult.
So, getting the I.D. wasn't a
big thing, but to actually
participate --
From the campaigns I've seen so
far, I've got to give Mr. Bryan,
Albert Bryan, credit.
I think they're running a pretty
progressive campaign.
The new wave of campaigning is
in social media...
>> Social media.
>> ...as I'm sure you're aware.
>> Oh, yeah.
We're doing that with the
Disability Rights Center.

We're connecting.

>> So, answering your question succinctly, yeah, I think the social-media kick --

If you have a slick social-media campaign, you're gonna be in pretty good shape.

>> Why do you think, though, that the 50-plus individuals aren't really, you know, as interested in voting?

Is it because they've been hearing the same issue over and over with no resolution?

>> Well, come on.

Look at our com--

>> Yeah, yeah, yeah.

I want to hear it from you, though.

>> Look at our community.

I mean, we've really --

This morning I was listening to the news and heard that the Bridge to Nowhere in St. Thomas was going to be going to somewhere Monday morning.

>> Oh. Okay.

>> The bypass took, what, 14 years to get complete?

>> Yes.

>> I don't know.

I think there is a need for a paradigm change in that things have to be looked at as more urgent, and I understand bureaucracy in and of itself. I mean, government is designed to be bureaucratic, but a lot of people are turned off from the voting process because they think it's not going to make a difference.

>> Okay.

>> But let me assure you that every single vote counts, and I think in these next few weeks, in the next four weeks, actually exactly 30 days to the election...

>> That's right.

>> ...this is gonna be a tight election.

It's only one time in the history of the Virgin Islands

that I know of, and somebody can correct me if I'm wrong there, a candidate had to face this number of candidates.

In 1998, I think Dr. Turnbull vanquished nine individuals -- vanquished nine individuals -- but that was in a primary, so that was only Democrats.

>> Okay.

>> This is a general election. Now we have seven people running for one seat, so this is going to be quite an experience.

>> In the gubernatorial.

>> Right.

This is quite an experience right now.

>> Yeah.

Okay.

We understand the St. Croix Retirement Government, Inc., obtained the required valid signatures for the reapportionment initiative and has been moved to the next step. I still hear people talking about they don't understand what that really, really means, and we're hoping that you might be able to bring some light to it because it's gonna be on the ballot, no?

>> No.

>> No, not yet?

>> No.

>> Oh, okay.

[Laughs]

But, still, I think people need to understand it so they can form their own decision in terms of, "Well, is it going to be something that's really going to make our senators accountable, or is it not?"

And I guess we'll answer this when we come back from our break.

[The Pointer Sisters' "Yes We Can Can" plays]

>> Now's the time for all good men to get together with...

I know we can can.

Yes, we can can. Why can't we?

If we wanna, yes, we can can.

>> We're back, and you're listening to "Ability Radio -- You and Your Life."

This is a reminder that if you have missed any portion of today's show, it is being recorded and will appear on our website at www.drcvi.org, and it's also available in scripted format.

Again, John, before we left for the break, we were talking about the reapportionment.

>> First, let me congratulate the St. Croix Retirees organization on their success in getting the ample number of signatures.

Secondly, this issue of reapportionment is one that I think has been very misunderstood.

More importantly, I think we're using the wrong term.

>> Oh, okay.

>> This is not reapportionment. This is how we are changing the system of election, how we elect people -- the number of people that we elect and how we elect and what's the issue.

In a true election sense, reapportionment is only done by three methodologies, and now we must add this fourth one.

Usually, reapportionment is done by a census activity.

Now, 10 years, according to the United States Constitution, which we are governed by, every 10 years, you need to assess your election process and look at your representations.

It can be done by the court -- by court order that the court can determine something needs to be done to improve your system of representation.

And, finally, it is also done by gerrymandering, which is where the legislature can create...not districts, because the Organic Act says only that Congress can

tell who has a district.

>> Okay.

>> So, we only have two legislative districts in the Virgin Islands -- St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix.

But we can gerrymander and change the quarters, for example.

We have Queen's Quarter.

It's seven quarters in St. Croix -- Queen's Quarter, King's Quarter.

But they can change those in gerrymandering, and that would change how people are represented.

And now we must add the issue of initiative, which an initiative is the process where the people themselves go to the government and say, "We'd like something on the ballot."

The question that I have asked, then -- any change in your system of representation always has to start with your goal. What is it that you want to achieve?

>> Okay.

>> It is my understanding, from times that I have been privileged to hear individuals to speak on the matter, is that they want to do greater accountability.

I personally don't see this change as giving us greater accountability.

As a matter of fact, as an elector, I feel that I'm losing some accountability now, 'cause we traditionally had seven senators representing each district and one at-large. Now we are going to have a significant number of at-large, a greater number -- I think six, but don't hold me to the numbers 'cause I don't remember the proposal completely in my head -- and I think four in the district.

So, now we'll have people that

are going to be voted on a territorial level, and that's just how you're voted for.

We must keep in mind that nothing is going to change in the structure of the legislature, in other words. According to the Organic Act, they must still meet in St. Thomas.

They must meet in the chamber. It will still be 15 members, and as we have now, we have district senators that vote on district and territorial issues.

We are going to have the same thing.

We'll just have some people elected at-large, but the structure of voting, the methodology and the institution of the legislature, shall remain exactly the same.

Nothing is going to change.

Now we will have people voting.

We will vote for them as electors-at-large, but when they get in the Senate, it's the exact same thing.

>> Let's kind of break that down a little.

Electors-at-large -- explain that.

>> So, we will have people that were voted for in the Virgin Islands by all three islands.

>> Everybody will vote for these.

>> I think the number is six, and, again, don't hold me to the number issued, but there are a certain number that are at-large.

>> Yeah.

>> And they will be voted for by the Virgin Islands population instead of each island district.

>> So, even if you don't know a senator from St. Croix that well, you'll still be required to vote for at-large senators?

>> That's correct.

So, you'll vote for Virgin Islands senators.

>> Right. Okay.

>> If this proposal had changed us from going from a unicameral legislature to a bicameral legislature, then it would have changed the structure. That might have been a very important move. So, instead of just having a single house we have now, we would have a house and a senate. You can call it whatever you want -- an assembly and a house. They have different names.

>> Like in the States.

>> Right. We would have a two-tiered government where the one tier would deal with district issues and the other would deal with territorial issues. If that were the structure, then this change would be magnanimous. It would be probably a really great thing.

>> Can that, what you just described, be maybe an amendment to this?

>> No.

>> No, because it's not law yet?

>> Not even 'cause it's not law. The petition is very specific.

>> Okay.

>> When they went to the supervisor, they have to empower a titling board. The titling board has to make a question. The question has to be a yes-or-no question once it's done. So, now they've gotten the necessary number of signatures, it goes to the Office of the Supervisor. She has a certain number of days to transmit it to the Senate. The Senate has 30 days to act upon it. As of today, as far as my knowledge is, it has not been transmitted to the Senate, which probably is a good thing, and if

I were a senator, I wouldn't want it to be transmitted, either, because I have the election 30 days from now, and this might affect how people see you.

So, I wouldn't want to vote on something this critical 30 days prior to election.

So, now they will get it.

When they do get it, they have 30 days to act on it, and they have two options -- three options -- if it's yes or no or send their own proposal.

However, even if they send their own proposal, both questions must automatically come on the ballot.

So, the Retirees question shall be on the ballot, and if they had something that they formulated, that would also be on the ballot.

If they say yes, that it's okay, then it moves to a special election.

Since we're missing the November 6th election -- this is not enough time to put this on the ballot...

>> Get on the ballot.

>> ...we will miss the November 6th election.

It will have to have a special election of which they will have to formulate an appropriation for.

If they say no, it automatically goes to the ballot.

Now we have a special election.

And if they come up with their own compromise, they send that to the supervisor and then we have the special election.

So, at any rate, this is gonna cost some money.

We have to have this activity in order to answer the question whether the people think this is a valid change in the governmental structure.

>> Right, 'cause we keep hearing there's a lot of people that are

for it, but I don't know if they're understanding what you just explained, that it's not changing the election system at all.

It's just moving things around...

>> Well, it's changing --

>> ...to a certain extent.

>> It's to the extent that it's changing the structure of...how we vote for people and what their title is going to be, but the structure of government, the structure of the system of the election, is not changing at all, and neither is it changing the structure of the legislature.

As I said, we're still having 15 people that are going to meet on the island of St. Thomas in the chamber and vote on both district and territorial issues. The district senators that we vote for will still vote on territorial issues.

That's not a change.

And the at-large people that we vote for Virgin Islands-wide will vote on district issues.

So, there is no change.

We already have this hybrid system indirectly.

>> Okay. Indirectly.

>> The change will be popular candidates -- and I can name a few, which I won't, but you know who they are -- popular candidates that have constituencies in both St. Thomas and St. Croix will be able to get elected at-large.

>> Okay.

>> Some people won't.

But it's really not making a big difference.

As I said, if we had changed to a house and a senate, to a bicameral legislature, which we cannot do without the approval of Congress...

>> Congress, right.

>> ...there's no structural

change.

>> And this doesn't change any of the committees that the senators are on?

>> No.

>> It'll still remain the same.

>> It stays the same.

I mean, we're not going to make an at-large Virgin Islands Senate for Public Works, Recreation, or something.

No. So, the structure of the legislature shall remain intact, and the hybrid system -- the change we are making will be just instead of everybody being elected on a district level, we are now having some people elected on the territory level, and that's -- that's it.

>> That's it?

>> Nothing beyond that.

However, I was thinking about some changes that need to be made myself, and I consider these changes to be what would be, for example, the at-large candidate in our present system --

>> Mm-hmm.

>> And, by the way, let me digress one quick second.

I do have some concerns about the proposal having St. John have its own representative, because, based on the United States Constitution and the "one man, one vote" concept, they must have at least 5,000 registered voters in the district in order to have that level of representation. They will be totally quadruply overrepresented in the legislature if they get a representative from St. John. And I don't know about the legality of this, and it's a question that somebody has to raise, and I'm throwing it out there in the universe now...

>> Okay.

>> ...that that might be something we need to look at

because that is definitely a violation of the United States Constitution.

>> Oh, wow. Interesting. Interesting.

Wow. You've given us a lot of food for thought, especially with this initiative.

>> But I do want to say I wish it well, and as this probably will be the first time in Virgin Islands history that an initiative has made it onto the ballot since the inception of the law.

So, I really would like to see this process work from a process point of view...

>> Process, right.

>> ...because it may encourage others, and I don't know if you ever study the State of California.

On their ballot, when they have a ballot, they have like 29 initiatives.

>> Tons.

Tons of initiatives, yeah.

[Laughs]

>> So, maybe this will encourage others...

>> Okay.

>> ...to say that it can be done.

>> That we need a change.

>> Right, in whatever the subject's happening.

It's the only subject that's off of the table when it comes to initiative or subjects related to money.

Taxes and expenditures of the government -- they cannot come through any initiative process, but pretty much everything else is on the table, and I just want to see the process of initiative work, and if nothing else comes out of this, I think that is a really big one.

>> Okay.

Well, that's good to hear.

Something good is coming out of this.

One of the things we wanted to talk to you about, because a lot of it has to do with our voters and how, you know, they're thinking in terms of who they're gonna vote for -- how resilient do you think they are?

>> You know, our voters are extremely resilient.

And people don't want to admit this, but we have a very high-level, highly educated electorate.

Our electorate -- they do pay attention.

People really don't think they pay attention, but if you have lived in the Virgin Islands for any length of time, you know in the Virgin Islands politics is a blood sport.

[Both laugh]

You eat, live, and die politics. I don't care.

You're at the dining table.

Somebody will say, "You read that there in the paper?"

Something is going to come up relative to politics.

It might be so pervasive that certain groups --

I know you were on the hospital board.

But certain organizations are affected by being overpoliticized, and that, to me, may have a negative impact in terms of management and people and turnover and those kinds of issues.

But it is a blood sport.

So, our electorate is really ready.

I think people really look forward to what I call the election season.

>> [Chuckles]

>> They really do, because -- barring the fish fries and all that stuff.

>> Yeah, barring that, yeah.

[Laughs]

>> I think people like the engagement with their

candidates, because, you know, we live in a small community. I used to live in New Hampshire when I went to graduate school, and it would be rare for a person in the State of New Hampshire to see a representative, an assemblyman of the state.

>> Uh-huh.

>> We walk on the street, and you can go in any store, anyplace, and run in to any of your elected representatives and basically stop them and talk, so I think they like the engagement, and I think they like to know that they know these people, that they're part of their activity.

So, the electorate is really ready.

I think this season, as I've been following it, has been exceptionally interesting.

>> Yeah, and it's true, because I hear the news in the mornings and, you know, going down to the Disability Rights Center and then coming back, you know, home, and, you know, you hear all these people calling in and talking about this, talking about that, and sometimes I have to shut it off.

>> True.

>> [Laughs]

I have to shut it off because I'm saying, "Oh, my God. There are so many different points of view."

>> Too much perception.

>> Yes. Yes. But it's good.

Like you said, it's good.

>> If you listen to any number of talk shows...

>> Uh-huh.

>> ...and not to say that we don't have enough -- probably have more than enough...

>> Yes.

>> ...there is always the political slant, and that's why I said our electorate, whether

people want to admit this or not, are highly educated. They kind of feed, for lack of a better phrase, on the food of politics.

>> [Laughing] We certainly do. But now let's keep it away from the agencies.

[Laughs]

>> I've used that word occasionally...

>> Yeah.

>> ...but you know as well as I do, politics is politics.

It's pervasive.

It's just like water.

It will find its level all the time.

>> Yes, it will, and it does.

Yes. Yes, I agree with that.

One of the things that we keep hearing from different candidates -- what they're gonna do, what they plan to do, what they would like to do -- but what should Virgin Island voters look for with respect to the candidates that are currently running for election?

What are some of the qualities that they need to consider?

You know, like sometimes I hear, "Well, I myself."

I want to hear what you're gonna say about integrity.

I want to hear what you're gonna say about what you're going to do, what your plans are.

You know, do you have long-term plans, short-term plans?

I mean, things like that -- this is what I look for.

>> I think that's a good approach.

One of the issues that I highly recommend is look at someone's moral-value system.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> I don't know if -- Miss Iris, I'm sure you're aware.

Got people running who'll say, "I'm a Christian," and they're some of the worst hypocrites

I've ever seen in my entire

life.

>> Yeah, I have.

>> Okay. So...

>> [Laughs]

>> And the moral-value system,
in other words -- as an adult,
we know what's right and what's
wrong.

It's just simply that.

>> Yes.

>> Treat people the way you want
to be treated.

And I look at the candidate.

Would I do that to somebody, in
other words?

Would I just say or do anything
to get elected?

I wouldn't trust somebody that
would do that because when
you're disingenuous once, you
can be disingenuous always, and,
a lot of times, we put up a
facade, and I've kind of coined
the phrase, "Use your public
persona."

Either you're the same person
public and private or you're
not.

>> Right.

>> And I understand having a
public face, meaning you might
not want to talk about your
private life and all of that.

That's different.

>> Right.

>> But you can't become a
different person.

Look at people's personality
traits.

What are their temperaments?

Can they speak to people?

Are they grouchy?

More importantly, are they
prepared?

What have they done in this
community?

I need to say this.

We have a number of individuals
that are seeking re-election
that have been in the Senate for
years and years and years and
years and years and years and
years and years.

If they couldn't do what they

were supposed to do before, what makes them think they can do it now?

So, you need to look closely.

What are they running for?

Are they running for a paycheck and the perks that go with that?

\$35,000 may not seem like a lot of money to some people, but it's a substantial amount.

And, in essence, you really probably get about \$125,000, maybe \$130,000, in perks.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> Why are you doing this?

Sometimes I look at -- and I'm going to actually put my head on a block here.

I look at a candidate, Donastorg, and I got to ask myself -- I ask myself this question.

This man must really, really want to do something in the Virgin Islands because he just won't quit.

He keeps putting himself out there under all kinds of adverse conditions.

And I think that may be something we need to look at.

It may be honorable.

I don't know.

But you got to look at traits -- the traits that the candidate bring.

You got to look at, like I said, their readiness.

What have they done in the community?

What community organization are they involved in?

What's their empathy level?

Things of that nature.

And I think it's almost like a woman reviewing a man and vice versa.

>> [Chuckles]

Before they get married?

>> Yeah.

[Both laugh]

And vice versa.

>> Uh-huh.

>> You got to watch the traits,

and I think that's critically important to watch the traits.
>> One of the things that I've always said since I came back home after I finished university was that whatever happens nationally trickles down here in the Virgin Islands, and we just finished going through a situation where a Supreme Court nominee was before the Senate and was accused of, you know, sexual issues.

But yet now it seems like he's going to be confirmed.

>> He shall.

>> Well, yeah, okay.

He shall be confirmed.

But my whole thing is...

why are we -- why do we allow things like that to happen?

>> Well, as you said, I think it's pretty clear.

In our American political system, of which we are integrally a part, whether people want to admit that or not, even though we don't vote on the national level...

>> Yeah. Right.

>> ...anything that happens there will trickle down here.

I am not -- I am not -- I am thinking that, if not sooner, we are going to have some people who are going to be outed here for a lot of similar activities.

>> Oh, wow.

>> And so why does it happen?

It's because the old boys' network and the browning of America, if anybody pays attention to these things, but I guess I just -- I won't quote for this, but the white Anglo-Saxon America is no longer as it was, and now we have the browning of America, and the moral-value system of America is changing.

>> It has, yeah.

>> Instead of being just straight-up hypocrites, now we have things that we accept.

I mean, back in the day, the LGB could not exist, and we are opening our eyes to more -- to more regular things to treat people all as equal.

So, I think what goes across the board has basically trickled down and will continue, 'cause what America says, we, yeah, go with that.

So, it's gonna happen here.

>> That's true.

>> It's just a matter of time.

>> Yeah, and I read that book, "The Browning of America"...

>> "The Browning of America."

>> ...when I was in college.

[Both laugh]

It was a good book.

>> And that is truly happening, because, as I believe the next census will prove, that more than 53% of America are people of color now.

>> Of color?

>> And that has changed the makeup of what --

Remember, now, and this is what startled me the most when I was watching the hearings with, uh...

>> Mm-hmm.

>> ...the good doctor and Mr. Kavanaugh, the men sitting there were the exact same men that went through the Clarence Thomas...

>> Yes.

>> ...case...

>> Yes.

>> ...and that was when -- 1991?

>> '91?

>> '92?

>> '92? Yeah.

>> Okay. And the same people [Coughs] -- excuse me -- are sitting in the same seats.

>> So we're not getting any different results.

[Laughs]

>> And, as you said, what happens in America...

>> Trickles down here.

>> So when you go in the booth

and vote for people this time,
remember who's sitting where,
and do you want to see the same
faces again?

And I do want to say one thing.
One thing I am looking at --
some of the candidates -- is we
might be in a Millennial change
now.

This is the first time I've ever
seen so many young people
interested in the process.

>> Yes. In the process.

>> And I'm hoping that they will
bring the younger people -- the
18-year-old to 25- or
30-year-olds -- into the fold so
that we can get -- because I am
a true believer, new blood
brings new ideas, and things
tend to change.

Maybe we will start to do things
-- 'cause the new wave now is
everything electronic.

>> Yeah.

>> Maybe we'll start moving to
an age where we're getting there
soon.

>> Yeah. I see that happening.

>> And, again, like I said
before, in everything, there's
some silver lining, and I think
this is a good thing, and I hope
that we can see the same thing
across America.

There's a young lady out of New
York, I think, that had recently
beat a longtime politician, a
young Senator, Congress of the
United States.

>> Yes. Yes.

>> I was speaking to the
delegate the other day, and I
was mentioning to her that this
is going to be the first
freshman class in Congress where
the majority of people there
will be under 30 years of age.
That's a good thing.

>> And more women.

>> Oh, and, by the way, I'm glad
you said that.

This is the year of the woman.

>> That's right.

>> Believe me.
I think in Virgin Islands
politics, we have one of the
highest levels of elected
women...
>> Yes.
>> ...in the last decade.
>> Yes.
>> Hold me to that.
>> I will. I will.
I'll bring you back on the show,
and I'll say, "Hey, it
happened."
[Laughs]
>> I really believe that, 'cause
I think -- and this is my
position, but maybe I'm exposed
to that.
>> No. Well, you know, I kind of
feel the same way, too, because
I've listened to what they've
had to say, and they come from
pretty good backgrounds.
>> No. No. They came from some
background.
>> Some background, yeah.
I'm saying, "Whoa."
>> Some background.
And I was saying to myself,
"Well, I know the candidate
wasn't a man, so..."
>> Well, you know, we're not --
>> We're not gonna go there.
[Both laugh]
>> Yes. Okay.
And, you know, it's funny
because the last time you here,
we were talking about we need to
go back to the schools...
>> Right.
>> ...and to the civil --
>> Civics.
>> Civics, because this is how
we're going to prepare these
children for the future.
>> Right.
>> Because I have a 7-year-old
granddaughter who's asking me,
"Why -- Why is --"
When I listen to the radio show,
she's there with me.
>> Listening with you.
>> She says, "Well, Grandma, why
so many people?"

I say, "Oh, honey, I don't -- I don't understand that dynamic." But it's kind of good that people are getting...

>> Engaged.

>> ...engaged.

>> Right.

>> Exactly.

And I think this is why we need to really engage in those civic classes for the youth and high school and don't wait until they're almost ready to graduate from high school or college to say, "Okay, yeah, you need to take a civic class."

No. It has to start early.

>> I think that problem has been addressed.

Honorable Novelle Francis has put in a bill, and now civics will be taught on the elementary level.

It will be back in the curriculum in the Virgin Islands schools, so, hopefully, because they say they're supposed to teach V.I. history, too, but it still isn't in the system, but, nonetheless, hopefully, it will get done, and I think civic teaching does create a dynamic where people get involved in volunteerism, in community development, and just a host of different subjects that might be very beneficial to the community at large because it instills a sense of community in you, generally.

>> Right. Right.

Do we have a caller?

We have a caller.

Caller, good morning.

>> Hi. Good morning.

Good morning, Iris.

>> Morning.

>> Hi. Great conversation again.

I really think that you're touching on a lot of good points.

You know, it was only when I looked at a ballot a couple days ago that I realized that it was

like only two incumbents from about seven.

>> That is correct.

>> Five new candidates in St. Croix and I think three in St. Thomas.

>> That's correct.

>> And, you know, it's just really a major shift, so when we look at this, we still have the Department of Education and the Board of Education.

You talk about change, and now you are looking at how are we going to adapt and do things when we have an old-school process that's being done that's not working or the education system.

How do we address that, and where do we come up as a community and say, "This thing is just killing our community, and we need to get away from this flat-schedule process"?

>> You know, I'm really grateful for the question, but I was gonna say to you we talk about things not changing.

I served on the Board of Education in 1986.

I served for a couple years. And I resigned because, again, of the issue of politics. We have to look at paradigm change and structure.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> In 1986, Alexander Farrelly was the governor.

I went to a meeting with him. I said, "Governor, point-blank question -- will you relinquish the reins of the education system to the Board of Education?"

He said, "No, John.

Why would I do that?

That's political suicide.

I have these people that vote for me.

They're under my control."

We need a paradigm change.

We need to take away the authority of the governance of

education from the governor, put it in a board.

The board needs to hire a superintendent.

The governor's role -- he should have a Commission of Education that sets policy and standards of which each student, teacher, educational institution must meet, but the actual running of the department needs to be done by a nonpartisan, nonpolitical entity that actually governs the system of this.

We need to consider -- and I know I will catch bullets for this, but sorry.

I have a tough back.

>> [Laughs]

>> We need to do away with certain portions of Act 4440, where we go negotiating salaries for people.

Knowing we do not have any money, I consider that to be in bad faith.

I am a trained arbitrator/mediator-hearing officer.

That's bad faith.

In the United States, under the federal government, they do not negotiate salary.

They negotiate benefits.

So, the President of the United States says, "We have 2% we can give this year."

I think Donald Trump this year said, "I ain't giving nobody no increase," if I remember hearing that on the news.

We need to take the politics out of -- and I just said to you earlier about its pervasiveness, that it's a blood sport.

>> Yes.

>> We need to take it out of our healthcare system, we need to take it out of our educational system, and that's the answer to the question where we can hold people accountable.

Now, we can hold the governor accountable.

He's just one.

He's gonna kick him out.

But we still have the same structure.

We've got to change the structure of the education system to put the governance where it belongs, and I think that's gonna be the answer.

>> You're totally right, because each administration, we're in the same issues, and, you know, it's all truth.

We've had a lack of, in the '70s and '80s, a lack of individuals that weren't great scholarly thinkers, they weren't "A" students, they didn't go on to college, but they came out of school with some kind of skill set.

>> Right.

>> And now you have just -- If you're not an "A" or "B" student, people don't talk about you.

Nobody recommends you.

You have no skill set to go and achieve, to say, "Okay, I wasn't great at English or history or whatever, but I'm a good plumber," you know?

"And I can go out and take care of --" or "I have a disability, and I can go and still be able to not age out of school and have nowhere to go."

>> But, you know, you're raising a good point, Julien, because even when I worked with special education, we were responsible for helping the high-school students that had a disability prepare for what happens when they leave.

>> Job market?

>> Yeah. And what we did was we implemented a state plan that will help --

We will test the students with vocational...

>> Aptitude?

>> ...aptitude, and then we would place these students

locally, until they graduated from high school, and we were so successful that we had like two or three students who were accepted in colleges in Florida. So, things work, but we have to want to make it work.

>> I think Julien's point is very pungent in that vocational education -- and, by the way, probably end up making more money than to have a degree.

But, again, it's a craft.

But a senator once told me when you have to go to the restroom, all the rest of your functions don't function well until you relieve yourself, so, yes, there is issues that you have to go through.

>> [Laughs]

Julien, thank you so much for calling us, and we'll be back after a brief break.

>> ...the world in which we live.

And we got to help each man be a better man with the kindness that we give.

I know...

Now's the time for all good men to get together with one another.

We got to iron out our problems and iron out our quarrels and try to live...

>> Hi again.

We're back, and you're listening to "Ability Radio -- You and Your Life."

Just a reminder that if you've missed portions of the show, it is being recorded and will appear on our website at www.drcvi.org, and it is also available in scripted format. We were having a really good conversation during the break time, so I want you to take it away now.

>> Well, as I was saying to you, I did want to just piggyback one more time on Julien's thought that we need to look at not

throwing away the old for the new.
>> Right.
>> My mother always said, basically, if ain't broke, don't fix it, you know?
But what happened to the one-room schoolhouse?
Like I said, we've created some of the greatest scholars in the world.
>> We have.
>> Edward Blyden, president of the University of Liberia, Roy Schneider, instrument technician, oncologist -- I mean, the gamut -- Dr. Heath, surgeon.
I mean, the gamut of people goes on and on and on and on.
And they were educated in one-room schoolhouses.
As I said, I recently had the opportunity to be shown some of the schools and their structural design.
What's good in the United States doesn't always have to work here.
>> Right.
>> Pearl B. Larsen, Alexander Henderson, I think, especially here on St. Croix -- they're schools that are completely sealed.
They can't open a window if they want to.
Why do we have that kind of design in the Virgin Islands?
"If it ain't broke, don't fix it."
So, we kind of should look at structural things like fresh air to children, those kind of things, and it might sound irrelevant to many people, but --
>> We're in the tropics.
>> Yeah.
>> We're in the tropics.
>> Yeah. In my learned opinion, why would I want --
I'm in an air-conditioned room all day.

The point is that we have to adapt to our environment.

>> Right.

>> And we might look -- and, again, when we were speaking, I was asking a question -- what are the parochial and private schools doing so well with so less resources than our governing institutions?

Like I said before, if we don't take the politics out of this and get back to basics, our reading, writing, and arithmetic, we have problems.

>> Yeah. Yeah.

>> And so I think -- and I hope several of our politicians will listen, because the basic work -- in order to be a plumber, you got to read.

You got to know how to add to make a building or how to charge somebody money.

So, if we get back to basics, fundamentals --

The reason Tim Duncan was one of the greatest basketball players in the history of this country is because they used to call him Mr. Fundamental.

>> [Laughs]

>> That's what we need to go back to -- fundamental basic teaching -- reading, writing, and arithmetic.

>> Exactly, and the Virgin Islands is so totally different from the States.

Okay, we're not that different from Florida, but when you go see schools in Florida, they all have windows.

>> They all have windows.

[Both laugh]

They have windows that you can open and close.

>> And close. Yeah, yeah.

So, yeah, it's true.

We have to go back to basics and fundamentals, you know, and many different emphases.

I want to go back to what you were saying about the politics

of agencies.

As you know, I was on the hospital board, and I just think that, hopefully, there will be a consideration to -- and I wanted to get your opinion on this, you know, what you think about this, so that board members can be elected and not chosen, or even if they're chosen, but I think that board members, coming, again, from the hospital board -- there are specific qualities or knowledge that is required. The hospital is a life-and-death entity.

It is not --

>> Yeah. You're telling me?

[Both chuckle]

>> It's not education.

It's not human services.

It's life and death.

And we have to really make sure that we do things the way we're supposed to do it for those types of situations.

Do you think that maybe electing board members will help?

>> I think an elected board for the hospital will be a great conceptual change.

I think that idea could work very well.

Additionally, as you were saying, I think because of the sensitivity of the hospital and the nature of the business, I've served as the chairman of the Health Insurance Board for 15 years, and the government kept saying that we were going to become self-funded, and I told them, "The minute we go self-funded, I'm resigning" because it is every decision you make -- and this is something else, and I think a lot of people end up on the hospital board, though, that understand the insurance side of this but not just the insurance side. The health administration is a little different -- it's greatly different -- than most other

forms of administration.
You have to know a little bit more than the normal person, and you should have some semblance of the medical understanding of the science of hospital administration.

And so, yes, I would support an elected board.

I think one of the issues, if you look at our present board -- and this is no disrespect to our sitting governor -- it is a stacked board with people who, statutorily, must sit, like having the director of OMB be on the board.

I don't see the rationale. I understand a lot of this historical and statutory, but I don't see the need for that kind of thing because the hospital -- him sitting on the hospital board don't get them no more money.

It doesn't address any of the service issues.

It doesn't address the collection issues or retention-of-personnel issues.

And we need a revamping. If I had the opportunity to speak to someone, I'd say, "We need to develop a health system, and the system needs to be across the board.

Everybody has to be connected." Frederiksted Health Center, East End Health Center, the hospital, the doctors, the footmen, the podiatrists -- every single person -- the dentist -- everybody, because your dental health is part of your medical health.

>> Exactly.

>> Okay. So, everybody that's in the field on any level needs to be part of a system.

It has to be a single entity that deals with everything in unison.

So, if I go to the hospital, I go to a doctor, if I go to the

hospital, my doctor should be able to know through...
>> Medical records.
>> ...e-records and that kind of thing, so we need to really look at making a system.
This disjointed chiefdom system we have where I run this and you run -- it's got to come together that if I sneeze, like America, somebody catch a cold.
>> Right. Right.
And I think there was some talk about this, but I still think that it starts with electing the members of the board, because when I worked in Atlanta, I used to go to the Emory system.
>> Okay.
>> And you could talk about everything there in one complex, you know, or in different satellite offices.
But it was part of the Emory system.
>> It's a system.
>> It's a system.
>> Johns Hopkins, Emory.
>> Yes, Emory. Yeah.
>> Even the one that everybody goes to --
>> Cleveland.
>> Cleveland! -- is a system.
And, again, part of that system is I think we should partner with --
I think when Dr. Schneider was in charge of the Department of Health, we went backwards in our health development because we were doing video issues and kidney transplants or heart transplants here in the Virgin Islands, and we were on the way to a system.
I don't know.
It seems as administrations change, the importance of the issue of health management changes, and I think we need to develop a system so no matter who becomes what...
>> Right.
>> ...that the system stays in

place and they're well-trained, well-documented people, and I'll just use the example.

The Board of Education is elected.

>> Yes.

>> And the majority of people on the Board of Education are either one -- former teachers...

>> Yes.

>> ...former administrators...

>> Yes.

>> ...former principals.

So...

>> Makes sense.

>> ...it makes sense.

They know the subject.

What if elections are a little different?

I think a little different.

I don't think you have to have the same kind of qualifications, so to speak, for a hospital.

You know, somebody said that it used to be they needed a doctor to run the facility.

I don't think you need a doctor.

You need a health administrator that has credentials in health planning -- quite a few in the Virgin Islands, and I think we need to start to tap in to some of those people, too.

>> I think so, too.

We have a break now?

Oh, okay.

Well, we'll continue this conversation then, because, again, it's important that you get people that have that kind of background, and if they're gonna be elected, those are the criteria that you look at when you're considering a nominee for whatever if they're gonna vote, you know, if they're gonna have elections that come before you. But, again, like you said, there's a need for restructuring a lot, because I recall, when I worked with the Medical Assistance Program at that time, the department -- I think for a long time, the Department of

Health was supposed to be the regulatory entity.

>> And, again, that's a big issue.

>> Yeah.

>> That's a big issue.

I was formerly the chairman of the Frederiksted Medical Center. Just turned over last year.

And so my point is here that we need to have some continuity there, and that's the issue.

Things have to --

Change in administration should be seamless.

For people like the hospital, it should never even be fazed by a political change.

>> Right.

>> If you look at organizations like Waste Management, I think recently every single person in the hierarchy of Waste Management had recently left, and they got new people.

I may not be perfectly correct, but I know a lot of them left.

I know the E.D. left.

A few other people left.

And they're filling a lot of them now, but I was like, "I think they may have to advertise in the paper."

It has to have some continuity in government, and certain agencies have to be seamless.

It can't be seen any other way.

>> Right. And, like you said, there has to be some continuity, because for the folks that had been there the longest, they can serve as mentors for the younger ones coming in there so they can move up and continue that continuity.

This is what we really need.

>> Transfer of information.

>> Of knowledge, 'cause we're losing a lot of institutional knowledge every time there's a change in administration, not to say that the folks coming in don't know.

They do know, but there's not

that continuity.

>> Today I picked up the paper,
and it has a section for
politics, and they have a list
of people that were fired by the
present administration, and I
started laughing because --

>> Yeah, we're gonna talk about
that when we come back.

[Laughs]

>> No. I wanted to thank you for
having me today, Iris.

I appreciate being here.

Invite me again any time, and
we'll come and sit down and
talk.

>> Oh, gosh!

We're having such a good time, I
thought we were gonna come back!

[Laughs]

Thank you, Virgin Islands, for
listening to us.

This is "Ability Radio -- You
and Your Life."

I know we can can.

Yes, we can.

Great gosh almighty.

Yes, we can.

I know we can can.

[Instrumental music plays]