The Virgin Islands Subjects' Dilemma

In 1936, Congress gave St. Croix and St. Thomas–St. John their own municipal councils. Local people made local decisions about their own towns.

In 1954, the Revised Organic Act abolished them. Since then, every decision about our roads, sidewalks, waterfronts, and town centers has been made by one central government. That same government controls the Water and Power Authority, our only utility.

Seventy years later, how has that worked out?

Walk from Christiansted to Gallows Bay and judge for yourself. The roads and sidewalks show you what a distant, centralized system thinks our towns are worth.

And when residents try to protect what's ours, the system overrules them. The Legislature passed a statute adopting the Revised Christiansted Town Plan, paid for with federal funds, which explicitly opposed a casino within the historic town limits. Townspeople and community leaders opposed it too.

Then the Legislature ignored its own statute and passed zone changes permitting an in-town casino. Two successive governors vetoed them. Both times, the Legislature overrode the vetoes, with votes from a majority of senators elected on St. Croix and St. Thomas. Christiansted had no way to hold anyone accountable. Its residents can't vote out a St. Thomas senator, and there is no town government to answer to them.

WHY? (Multiple choice)

A. The 1954 structure gives the Governor and Legislature no way to hand local decisions back to local people, even if they wanted to.

B. Centralized control of budgets and power is hard to give up once you have it.

C. Problems in Christiansted, Frederiksted, and Charlotte Amalie compete for attention with every other problem in the Territory, and they lose.

D. All of the above.

The real question isn't whether to trust them. It's why our towns should depend on trusting anyone that far away.

There is an alternative. The Municipal Corporations Act would restore what we had before 1954: local governments, accountable to the people who actually walk those streets, with the authority to fix them.

We governed our own towns once. We can do it again.