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From Honors to Funding: Diverse Bills Sail Through Senate Session

Senate votes favorably on several crucial nominations including Sandra Setorie and Clement Magras

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Senate President Novelle Francis, Jr. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

A series of bills breezed through a Senate session of the 35th Legislature on Tuesday, and will land on the Governor's desk for further action. These included Bill 35-0014, which names a bridge on St. Thomas in honor of Wayne "Facts Man" Adams, Bill 35-0074 to rename North Shore Road on St. John in honor of former senator Armando "Rocky" Liburd, and Bill 35-0091, honoring basketball star Aliyah Boston by bestowing upon her a key to the territory.

A series of nominations were also voted through, including Sandra L. Setorie as the executive director of the Public Services Commission, Clement 'Cain' Magras to sit on the Public Services Commission for the district of St. Thomas, and Kasima I. Knight-Hodge to serve on the Real Estate Commission for the District of St. Thomas. While voted unfavorably in the Committee on Rules and Judiciary, senators also [considered the nomination](#) of Laura Nichols-Samms for the V.I. Public Services Commission for the District of St. John.

Before her nomination went to a vote, Sen. Kenneth Gittens clarified that "the Legislature passed Act number 8452, which sets the qualifications for PSC members. This nominee unfortunately does not meet those requirements." Despite his and other senators' reservations, ten senators seemingly voted to move the unfavorable nomination to the governor, who initially nominated Ms. Nichols-Samms.

"Laura Nichols to serve on the Virgin Islands Public Service Commission, district of St. John has been approved by the 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands," declared Senate President Novelle Francis Jr, before banging his gavel.

Affirmative votes were also cast for two leases of public land: Bill 35-0067 relating to Inter-Island Auto Group, LLC doing business as VIP Quick Lube, and Bill 35-0104, relating to Roncan, Inc. doing business as Sand Castle on the Beach.

Senators later considered the following appropriations measures, each of which received favorable votes after the allotted debate time: Bill 35-0190, which provides \$350,000 for bottled water for residents affected by St. Croix's water crisis; Bill 35-0180, which makes available funding for ongoing construction of the Paul E. Joseph Stadium to the tune of \$5.1 million; Bill 35-0191, which sets aside \$17 million for the dredging of the Charlotte Amalie Harbor, and Bill 35-0048, a measure that requires that annual contribution reports be sent to GERS members by the pension system.

These bills, too, would go through generally unencumbered, despite the occasional word of caution from various senators. Discussing the [Paul E. Joseph](#), several lawmakers lamented the protracted construction period - spanning three governors as explained by Sen. Franklin Johnson. Sen. Samuel Carrion warned that thanks to this latest tranche of funding pumped into the project, "we don't want any more excuses." Sen. Angel Bolques expressed, "I'm very hopeful that this will be the last time that we would have to appropriate any funds for Paul E. Joseph stadium and hopefully have a stadium sometime in 2024." Sen. Marvin Blyden was also optimistic, stating, "I hope that this \$5.1 million is the end of the road for funding for this long-anticipated investment on the island of St. Croix."

Mr. Gittens wasn't so positive: "Once this \$5 million has passed we would have paid over \$32 million for this. And yet we're still in limbo as to how much more money would be needed to add in the [Crucian Christmas] Festival Village portion."

Funding for the [dredging of the Charlotte Amalie Harbor](#) was also scrutinized. Noting the revenue collected from each cruise visitor, Sen. Ray Fonseca wondered why "the government still has to come up with \$17 million to dredge the harbor," a sentiment shared by Mr. Gittens. Sen. Donna Frett-Gregory, too, continued her calls for VIPA and the West Indies Company to find new ways to generate revenue, "so that they don't have to come back to the institution of the Legislature in future years to ask for funding.

The \$17 million could have been used for a lot of other things." Mr. Francis, the Senate president, agreed. He suggested that "there are some opportunities there for public-private partnership."

VIPA officials had [previously suggested](#) that the Charlotte Amalie Harbor, like others across the nation, become the responsibility of the federal government, which would then allocate funding to the Army Corps of Engineers for regular dredging.

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