

logo not found or type unknown

Police Commissioner Calls Senator Johnson "Intellectually Unarmed," Demands Apology For Calling Officers Cowards

Police Commissioner Ray Martinez confronts Senator Johnson on comments about law enforcement

Senate / **Published On December 13, 2023 04:37 AM /**

Nelcia Charlemagne **December 13, 2023**

Image not found or type unknown



**From left to right, Police Commissioner Ray Martinez, and Senator Franklin Johnson.
By. V.I. LEGISLATURE**

Tensions flared during Wednesday's Committee on Homeland Security, Justice, and Public Safety, as Senator Franklin Johnson and VIPD Commissioner Ray Martinez came face-to-face for the first time since the commissioner's notable absence during a public safety meeting on St. John.

During that meeting, Sen. Johnson, outraged that Mr. Martinez had declined several invitations to testify before lawmakers, [moved a motion to subpoena](#) the police commissioner whenever he was requested to testify. Committee members largely supported the motion, but on December 6, Mr. Martinez appeared before the [Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services](#), seemingly without needing to be coerced.

During discussions on safety considerations for the Crucian Christmas Festival during Tuesday's meeting, Mr. Johnson prefaced his line of questioning by telling Mr. Martinez that he was "very disappointed thus far" in his performance. He then proceeded to ask a question about payment considerations for police officers scheduled to work overtime during the Christmas season.

By way of response, the VIPD commissioner told Committee chair Senator Kenneth Gittens that "until such time that your colleague apologizes to my officers for calling them cowards, I, nor my executive team, nor anybody that I send to represent the VIPD while I'm here under this tenure will be responding to anything, whether verbal or written, from your colleague."

This remark triggered a tense exchange between the two parties, with Sen. Johnson using it as a justification for his previous call for a subpoena. "He should never be in front of us without a subpoena," he contended. The lawmaker continued, doubling down on statements made during the special St. John session. "As long as we continue putting people like this, beggars begging for support, to come in front of us and be disrespectful, I have a right to call you, Commissioner Martinez, a coward," Mr. Johnson retorted.

He dismissed the commissioner's request, declaring that there would be "no apology" on his part. While Sen. Gittens banged his gavel and attempted to quell the situation, Mr. Martinez repeatedly scolded Mr. Johnson "do not ever lie on me." As voices remained raised, Mr. Gittens, on a point of order, reminded his colleague that his time had been called, before resorting to calling a two-minute recess in an attempt to restore order. Even after the video feed was temporarily interrupted, however, listeners were able to hear Mr. Johnson exclaim that it was "a joke with these people here," through an open microphone.

After the resumption of the session, Mr. Johnson, who was attending virtually, made two failed attempts to catch the chair's attention, after which he announced that he would be excusing himself from the rest of the discussion. "I will wait for the subpoena for this agency where I'll ask all my questions," he said, while the session subsequently continued with no further mention or acknowledgement of the testy exchange between the two public officials.

Reached for comment on Tuesday evening, Mr. Martinez was unapologetic about his position. "You don't ever call my officers cowards. My officers are out here on the street every day responding," Mr. Martinez noted. Acknowledging that "we can always police better," the commissioner insisted that he stands "one thousand percent" behind the officers of the Virgin Islands Police Department. "They're second to none. I'm not going to stand by and allow anybody to call my officers cowards," he maintained, noting that officers have increasingly become targets of violence from suspects.

Addressing Mr. Johnson's charge of incompetence, Mr. Martinez suggested that he reflect on his own record in the Legislature. "Look at how many bills they've passed and how relevant they have been," he retorted.

The commissioner, however, made it clear that the VIPD's shunning of Sen. Johnson was limited only to correspondence and inquiries made as it relates to his role as a legislator. "If something occurs, and we have to respond, and there's a call for service to protect him, he would be protected

just like every other citizen would be protected," Mr. Martinez vowed.

Nevertheless, he was resolute in his stance against interacting with Mr. Johnson in his capacity as a senator, calling him dishonest in his remarks, particularly his characterization of Mr. Martinez as begging him for a job. Explaining that he met with all lawmakers prior to his confirmation hearing, the VIPD commissioner disputed Mr. Johnson's description of the encounter. "I've never been in his office. The one time that he and I sat...was at Gertrude's Restaurant," Mr. Martinez clarified, saying that the meeting was frustrating because Mr. Johnson "was more paying attention to his watch and watching the time because...he was rushing off to go catch a flight to leave the island....He is a liar."

Noting that he will continue to respond to and work with the other 14 legislators in the chamber, Mr. Martinez was resolute in his demand for an apology from Mr. Johnson on behalf of the officers of the V.I. Police Department.

Unless that is forthcoming, the stonewalling will continue, the VIPD commissioner vowed. "I refuse to engage in a battle of wits with an intellectually unarmed individual like him," Mr. Martinez declared.