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Senators Reject Additional Funding for Stadium, Demand Contractor Testify Under Oath

With construction dragging on for nearly a decade, senators criticize the contractor's slow pace and lack of workforce. Lawmakers reject a potential \$2 million delay claim and push for accountability through a legislative subpoena.

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Construction at the Paul E. Joseph Stadium, a project that began in the final days of the de Jongh administration in 2014. By. DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS.

The contractor behind the long-delayed Paul E. Joseph Stadium project may soon be required to testify under oath before the V.I. Legislature. A lawmaker has proposed subpoenaing GEC LLC to account for the slow progress of construction.

Senator Kenneth Gittens's commitment came after an extensive discussion on the project's status during Tuesday's Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance meeting. Of the \$32 million allocated, over \$25 million has already been spent. Now, the Department of Public Works (DPW) says the Government of the Virgin Islands is reviewing a contractor's [delay claim](#), which could cost between \$1.5 million and \$2 million. The delay arose after changes to the stadium's footprint were required following the 2017 hurricanes when it was discovered the project was located in what DPW describes as a "floodway." The Federal Emergency Management Agency mandated modifications, but approval was not immediate. This, DPW Commissioner Derek Gabriel explained, is why the department is even considering the delay claim.

However, it's a request that several lawmakers say they are not amenable to. "Nobody don't come and ask me for no more money. Me ain't voting for it," declared Senator Franklin Johnson. He was the first to initiate discussion on the stadium's status, deeply disturbed by the apparent lack of an appropriate workforce. "I don't think we're going to get this project complete with this particular company," lamented Mr. Johnson. Tawana Nicholas, attached to the Super Project Management Office, verified that recently, there have been 'significantly less than 10 on site.'

According to committee chair Senator Novelle Francis Jr., "We should be ashamed to back some additional funding for Paul E. Joseph stadium when this has been delayed for all these years." He complained that GEC "has really been bad in all of these projects."

Senator Kurt Vialet, meanwhile, was perturbed that the contractor had been allowed to proceed with a skeleton crew on site. "Is the department saying that it is okay for a contractor to have two employees on a regular basis and the same government entertaining a claim of a delay by the government for some \$2 million?" he asked. According to Mr. Vialet, "arrogance...causing this government to make foolish decisions." He further contended "if this government don't get serious, every contractor can take advantage of us."

"I don't know which of my colleagues are going to support that \$2 million so I don't know exactly where you're going to get that money from," Mr. Vialet advised Mr. Gabriel.

During an exclusive interview with the Consortium earlier this month, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. suggested that an acute lack of labor is behind many of the slow and stalled projects in the territory. With record low unemployment, "there's nobody to do this work," he said at the time. "So when people are saying the recovery is slow, it can't move any faster, because we don't have the resources in terms of people to do it."

Whatever the reason, the failure to complete the stadium in a reasonable timeframe has been demoralizing for the community. Senator Hubert Frederick noted that the still-incomplete project is "frustrating to a lot of my constituents." Despite DPW testifying that the current schedule places project completion in the final quarter of 2025, Mr. Frederick still had doubts. "It's unlikely that we'll be able to enjoy our Crucian Christmas Festival in a facility that's completed...like we used to in the past," he said.

The Paul E. Joseph project has dragged on for [nearly a decade](#). "I took a lot of blows on this same project here in the 30th Legislature when I told him we were given millions for a pig in a basket," Senator Gittens recalled. He doubted that the remaining \$7 million available for the project "will be sufficient for the completion." Currently reviewing the scope of the project, Mr. Gabriel admitted that "there may be some items that we may have to come back down to this body for."

It is unlikely that Senator Gittens will accede to any such requests. "I ain't voting for another dime for this company again," he said, followed by his suggestion that the Legislature "subpoena this

company to come before us and get in here and answer the questions that we need answers to.”

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