

## Fonseca's Response on Road Tax Bill Ignores Taxi Exemption Uproar, Omits Annual Fee Proposal

Fonseca disputes claims about his highway user tax bill but does not address its exemption for taxi operators. Meanwhile, Public Works Commissioner Derek Gabriel proposed making the fee an annual payment, a suggestion Fonseca did not challenge.

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Senator Ray Fonseca. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

In response to recent Consortium article on Bill No. 36-0023, Senator Ray Fonseca has issued a press release claiming that media coverage misrepresented his proposed highway user tax legislation. While he disputes certain aspects, his statement fails to address key provisions of the bill, particularly the exemption of taxi operators from the tax increase, despite their heavy use of

the territory's roads.

Fonseca's response asserts that the tax increase would only apply to new vehicles brought into the territory, rather than all vehicle owners paying an annual fee. However, this does not acknowledge the ongoing legislative discussions surrounding potential amendments to the bill.

During the March 18 legislative hearing, Public Works Commissioner Derek Gabriel proposed making the tax an annual payment due at registration, a recommendation that Fonseca did not challenge. Gabriel also stated that a portion of the fees, particularly those from heavier vehicles, should be directed to the District Roads Funds to support road maintenance and repairs.

Furthermore, Fonseca's statement does not address concerns raised by lawmakers and government officials regarding the exemption of taxi operators from the tax increase. Commissioner Gabriel strongly opposed this exemption, arguing that taxi operators utilize the roads just as much, if not more, than privately owned vehicles and that failing to tax them would leave significant revenue on the table.

"They use our roadways just as much, if not more, than privately owned vehicles," Gabriel stated during the hearing. "That is a huge revenue-generating opportunity that we're leaving on the table."

His comments were echoed by Senator Novelle Francis Jr., who argued that everyone should pay their fair share, while Senator Kenneth Gittens pointed out that taxi drivers use the roads more than the average motorist.

However, Fonseca defended the taxi industry's exemption, stating: "Our taximen and women are hard-working local businessmen. We need to do everything we can to sustain the taxi industry and give them all the benefits so that they can continue to thrive."

At Fonseca's request, Bill No. 36-0023 remains in committee for further discussion and potential amendments. While his press release suggests that most vehicle owners will not be affected, it omits the fact that lawmakers are actively considering changes that could alter how the tax is implemented, including the potential shift to an annual payment model.