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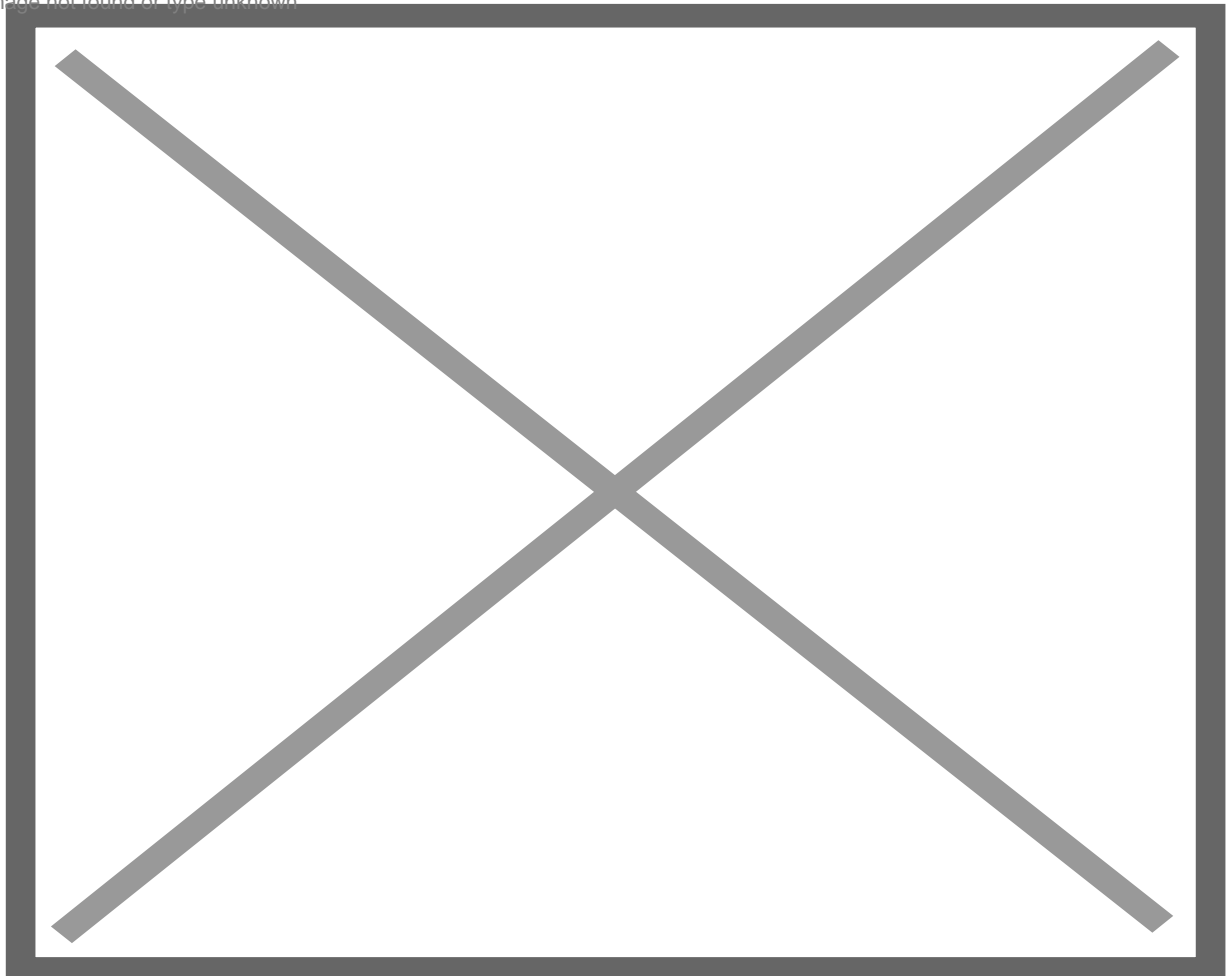
## RT Park Laments Business Exits, Power Instability, and Fallout From Public Statements as Five New Companies Join Program

Despite onboarding five new clients and expanding STEM partnerships, RT Park ED Eric Sonnier says exits driven by healthcare limits and power instability—as well as damaging Senate remarks—have led to missed investments and a company relocating to PR.

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RP Park Executive Director Eric Sonnier. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE.

Though the USVI's Research and Technology Park continues to make steady strides in attracting businesses to set up headquarters in the territory, challenges outside of the Park's control are

causing some companies to rethink their choice, according to testimony from RT Park's new executive director, Eric Sonnier.

On Monday, Sonnier appeared before the Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture to provide an update on all things relevant to the Park. He spoke enthusiastically about progress in attracting businesses, STEM and STEAM programs in the territory's elementary schools, and even stronger partnerships with the University of the Virgin Islands. Nonetheless, he did not hesitate to inform lawmakers that since the fiscal year started, at least one company had formally exited the Park, and two more are in the process of doing so.

"These exits were driven by a need to relocate due to family obligations, frequent power outages and medical circumstances that involve treatments that cannot be performed within our local healthcare system," explained Mr. Sonnier. "These transitions reflect the human realities that occasionally influence participation in our program."

Senator Hubert Frederick, the committee's chair, was disheartened. He bemoaned the unstable power situation, noting that it is "hard to run a sustainable business, a profitable business if you don't have reliable energy."

The company in question was based on St. John. "He had more issues than our clients on St. Thomas and St. Croix, and he tried to make it work. He cycled through all the different ISPs. He blew through a few routers," shared Mr. Sonnier. Ultimately, power woes and "family obligations" forced the business to close up shop.

As for the company whose personnel cited inadequate healthcare, Mr. Sonnier explained that there are "certain circumstances that you can't take care of here in the territory. When those circumstances get to be too much, then people have to make decisions on whether they can stay here or leave."

"There's not much we could do, but it just goes to show that we're aware of the impact of some of these things that are having on our economy," said a somber Senator Frederick.

Power challenges also concerned Senator Angel Bolques Jr., who was initially buoyed to learn that the RT Park is working diligently to attract blockchain companies. Blockchain technology is an "is an advanced database mechanism that allows transparent information sharing within a business network." However, as Sen. Bolques observed, "blockchain requires an immense amount of power."

"As much as that would be great for the Virgin Islands, unfortunately, with our current power provider, we would not be able to do that. But we know we have to address our infrastructure before we can see that happen here in the Virgin Islands," he remarked.

While these challenges are out of the RT Park's and the Legislature's hands, Mr. Sonnier reminded lawmakers that their words are far-reaching. Comments made on the Legislative floor, he said, compromised an agreement that was in the pipeline.

"It has come to our attention that public remarks made, both on the Senate floor and in media outlets, have suggested that the UVI RT Park lacks compliance protocols," [Mr. Sonnier lamented](#). "This is not accurate, and unfortunately, such misstatements can have significant consequences...A company that was seriously considering relocating to the U.S. Virgin Islands ultimately chose Puerto Rico instead. Their decision was based in part on public comments made on the Senate floor," he told the legislators.

“Not only was this a missed business opportunity, but it's also a loss of investment, direct benefits to UVI STEM programming and potential jobs,” the executive director complained. He countered the statements made, saying that “we take compliance seriously, ensuring that our negotiations with clients result in real, tangible benefits for the community, and that clients are held accountable to the terms outlined in their Park tenant agreement.”

It's a situation Senator Marvin Blyden called “unfortunate.” The RT Park plans to press on. With five new clients onboarded in the current fiscal year, the total territory-wide number stands at 70, with approximately 250 Virgin Islanders employed across them all.

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