

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Dispute Emerges as Senators Approve Nine-Year Extension of \$150 Million Credit Line

Novelle Francis said the extension aligns with federal deadlines for disaster recovery, but Dwayne DeGraff and Alma Francis Heyliger questioned oversight, open-ended access to \$50 million, and the risk of added costs for government operations.

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A decision to extend the government of the Virgin Islands' \$150 million [line of credit to 2035](#) was on the receiving end of criticism from independent Senators Dwayne DeGraff and Alma Francis Heyliger on Wednesday.

The amendment was offered by Senator Novelle Francis to [Bill 36-0174](#), one of the many budget bills being considered. The line of credit had previously been extended to expire on September 30th, 2026. Mr. Francis's amendment sought to extend it by a further 9 years.

Responding to DeGraff's objection, Francis explained that "we had a previous sunset date on the line of credit for disaster recovery projects." The new date, therefore, is "consistent with the federal program which allow for 2% offset of our disaster recovery programs." Sen. DeGraff did not consider it a reasonable cause.

"We're going to corral this line of credit going forward now into our next administration, and I think it's a bit much to do right now," he countered.

But Senator Francis pushed back, explaining that the disaster recovery projects must be completed by 2035 to maintain the lower cost-share arrangement. "There is some big-ticket items in terms of the bundles [that] have been established" he stated. The line of credit, therefore, allows the authorities to "utilize the line of credit, reimburse it, and continue that. There's no need for them to come on an annual basis for that."

It was then Senator Francis Heyliger's turn to express her misgivings. She reminded her colleagues that a portion of the line of credit is intended for "government operations." She questioned whether the extension would "distinguish" between the two uses.

[In September 2024](#), the government's line of credit included \$100 million to support disaster recovery projects, while an additional \$50 million was allocated to pay vendors.

Sen. Francis asserted that "this has nothing to do with the administration. It has to do with the disaster recovery program." He maintained that "this will not disenfranchise anyone from coming before this body again to monitor the reimbursement, [or] the use of the credit line as required."

His response did not satisfy Francis Heyliger. She still wanted to know whether the funds would be differentiated, "or we're going to have that additional \$50 million open-ended for the government to keep using." "Our goal, when we approved that, was to shut down that section of the money by the end of this administration, so that they didn't have an additional \$50 million being rolled over to add cost to us," she stated.

But with Sen. Francis's debate time expired, the amendment went to a vote. Both Senators Francis Heyliger and Dwayne DeGraff voted against the amendment, but were overruled by their colleagues. DeGraff would later vote in the affirmative for Bill 36-0174, which included other amendments, but Senator Francis Heyliger abstained.