

## Senators Rebuke Each Other “In Jesus Name” During St. Croix Horse Race Track Funding Debate

**A heated exchange erupted in the Senate as Sens. Carla Joseph and Novelle Francis clashed over a proposal to assess the economic viability of horse racing on STX, turning debate on Bill 36-0119 into a fiery confrontation that required order to be restored**

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**Senators Carla Joseph and Novelle Francis Jr. clash during debate over funding for the Randall “Doc” James Racetrack on St. Croix, trading sharp rebukes before order was restored in the Legislature. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE.**

Tensions flared in the Legislature on Thursday, after Senator Carla Joseph and Novelle Francis clashed over Sen. Joseph's intention to assess the economic viability of horse racing on St. Croix.

Among the agenda items on Thursday was Bill 36-0119, an act amending Act No. 8651 by [rerouting appropriated funds](#) to the Department of Sports, Parks, and Recreation to support the completion of the Randall “Doc” James Racetrack on St. Croix.

Weeks ago, when the bill was before the Committee on Rules and Judiciary, Sen. Joseph, its chair, suggested that “we need to look comprehensively and do some type of assessment to find out the viability and...economic impact of horse racing in the Virgin Islands.”

“I have to see the numbers and to see a study that is comprehensively done so that we could say, hey, horse racing is great. It's bringing in all of this money. It helps with the multiplier effect,” she stated then.

On Thursday, Senator Joseph largely took credit for uncovering the troubles with the former contractor, VIGL. “I sent out a press release for the Committee on Culture, Youth, Aging and Sports and Parks to call in VIGL. Those human beings were not doing any work there to help horse racing in the Big Island.” According to her, “some of the people who are really from the big island of St. Croix weren’t very supportive of [them] being subpoenaed to come and testify before that committee.”

“It took a St. Thomian now to appropriate some monies to get things moving and get things D, O, N, E, exclamation point,” Sen. Joseph declared.

She again reiterated her concerns over revenue generation. “I do have an amendment, but the amendment source of funds is going to come, and I'll bring it at the appropriate time,” she promised. She insists that an assessment is critical. “We need to see that we are not just putting money out there and not getting any returns.”

Sen. Francis, who speaks immediately after Sen. Joseph during legislative sessions, described her statements as “shots fired.”

“On St. Croix, horse racing been going on for 50, 60, 70 years. All of a sudden, you want to find out about it,” Sen. Francis countered.

“That bill is dead on arrival,” he warned his colleague.

His declaration prompted Sen. Joseph to “rebuke” Sen. Francis “in the name of Jesus” to which prompted him to swiftly respond, “I rebuke you in the name of Jesus.”

Order was soon restored to the chambers. Returning to the discussion of Bill 36-0119, Sen. Francis admitted that the funding is “insufficient” but “it's a start, and it will get us going.”

“There's no need for us to be pitting one district against the next,” said Senator Marise James. “I think that the goal to be achieved here is that we could have all of the districts working together, have competitive racing throughout.”

The exchange drew comments from several lawmakers, including Senator Kenneth Gittens who stated that he “really didn't appreciate the tone earlier.”

Sen. James, daughter of the St. Croix racetrack’s namesake, was disappointed. “It's really sad that I would hear such violent words expressed around his name,” she lamented. “We need to calm down,” she urged.

“It's just sad because I knew how much my father loved horse racing, and I also knew how much he loved the island of St. Croix and how much he loved the Virgin Islands. So I'm hoping, going forward, that when his name is called in this regard with the racetrack, that it will somehow bring us together and it will not divide us,” Senator James pleaded.

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