

Multiple Top Officials Convicted, More Await Sentencing and Trial: Panel Warns Weak Oversight and Poor Enforcement Failed the Public

Following the sentencing of former officials and with more cases pending, panelists during a WTJX discussion examined whether internal oversight, audits, ethics enforcement, and safeguards are being adequately applied as recovery funds continue to flow.

Government / **Published On January 28, 2026 05:59 AM /**

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With federal corruption cases involving former top officials moving through the courts, a renewed public debate has emerged over whether the Virgin Islands has sufficient internal safeguards to prevent misuse of public funds—particularly as billions in federal recovery dollars continue to flow through government agencies.

That question took center stage Monday evening during a WTJX panel discussion, where local professionals and former lawmakers reflected on a string of convictions and pending sentencings tied to senior figures in the current administration. The panelists were part of WTJX's State of the Territory Address cohort, who examined not only the conduct that led to federal prosecutions, but also whether local accountability systems are being applied with equal rigor when public funds are involved.

The discussion unfolded against the backdrop of the [recent sentencing of Calvert White](#), the former commissioner of the Department of Sports, Parks, and Recreation, who last week received a five-year prison term following his federal conviction on corruption charges. Additional scrutiny looms with the upcoming sentencing of Jenifer O'Neal, former director of the Office of Management and Budget, and Ray Martinez, the former commissioner of the V.I. Police Department. Davidson Charlemagne, once director of maintenance at the Department of Education, [is awaiting trial](#), while Darin Richardson, the former chief operating officer of the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority, is [scheduled to be sentenced](#) this Friday after being convicted last March on bank fraud and money laundering charges.

The individuals referenced during the panel were all alleged—and in several cases found guilty by juries—to have misused federal funds. Some of those funds were tied to the unprecedented influx of federal recovery dollars made available following the 2017 hurricanes and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the WTJX discussion, panelists questioned whether comparable levels of scrutiny are consistently applied when projects involve local resources rather than federal oversight.

“It’s disappointing that these convictions are coming from the federal level,” said Kurt Marsh, an architect and member of the Historic Preservation Commission. “I think we need to practice greater accountability amongst ourselves.”

Marsh pointed to the White Collar Crime and Public Corruption Unit, which Attorney General Gordon Rhea has said would benefit from additional and dedicated staffing. He also raised concerns about how audit findings are treated within the government.

“We have an inspector general sometimes whose reports are not paid attention to and carried with the weight that they should be carried with,” Marsh said. He added that existing transparency and accountability mechanisms may need to be revamped or redeveloped to ensure they remain effective.

Attorney Kye Walker echoed those concerns, arguing that the government should adopt a more proactive stance in preventing misconduct before it rises to the level of criminal charges.

“Some people may not understand what corruption looks like. When you’re talking about the commissioners, that’s a higher level, but you could have lower-level corruption that people just don’t understand is corruption,” she said.

Walker suggested that all incoming government employees be required to undergo “some sort of training for ethics and corruption,” saying such instruction could help workers identify, avoid, and report improper conduct. In January 2025, following the charging of five former senior public officials, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. [signed an executive order](#) establishing a new code of ethical conduct for government employees. Later that year, in August 2025, the Division of Personnel hosted an “Integrity in Action” ethics [workshop](#) aimed at “strengthening ethical standards within the government.”

Former Senator Usie Richards, who also participated in the panel, argued that existing checks and balances have not always been respected across government agencies.

He said those safeguards have been “set aside by various departments and agencies,” and urged a renewed focus on reinforcing administrative processes that govern how public money is spent. Richards noted the need to “tighten and focus on the administrative process that secure the expenditure of the finances of government.”

Accountability systems, Richards said, “not only needs to strengthen, but needs to be enforced from the top level of each department and agency down to each one of the employees who are the lower level that works on behalf of the people.”

During his final State of the Territory address, Governor Bryan referenced the disgraced former officials, affirming that his administration is “committed to integrity and does not tolerate leaders who abuse their position of power at the expense of our people.”

It's a mandate that will also have to be adopted by the duo that wins the 2026 gubernatorial election, as federal recovery projects kick into high gear and public scrutiny increases.