

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Senators Want Governor De Jongh To Pay Back \$500,000 Used To Renovate Private Home

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When it was revealed in 2009 that Governor de Jongh had used \$500,000 of government funds to renovate his private home, a whirlwind of emotions, ranging from anger to disbelief, seized the community and senators alike. The anger lives on, and today, at a Senate hearing in St. Thomas, senators passed a resolution requesting Governor de Jongh pay back the money in its entirety.

Governor de Jongh took office in 2007, but instead of living at the Governor's mansion in Estate Catherineberg, he chose to reside at his private residence -- where Public Works spent over \$490,000 erecting a fence, building a guard house and installing a camera system. The project was given the green light after Public Works sought and received an

opinion from the V.I. Attorney General's office, stating it was permissible to move ahead with the work once public interest was served and was the main reason for the expense.

But in 2010, the U.S. Interior Department inspector general's office concluded in a report that the renovations of de Jongh's private home with public funds, "usurped the Legislature's authority to determine how to spend public funds" and should be returned.

To date, the Governor has not returned the money.

At today's Senate hearing, 13 senators voted for the measure urging de Jongh to reimburse the government, one senator voted against and one was absent.

1. Senator Craig Barshinger -- Yes
2. Senator Judi Buckley -- Yes
3. Senator Diane Capehart -- Absent
4. Senator Donald G. Cole -- Yes
5. Senator Kenneth Gittens -- Yes
6. Senator Clifford Graham -- Yes
7. Senator Alicia "Chucky" Hansen -- No
8. Senator Myron Jackson -- Yes
9. Senator Shawn-Michael Malone -- Yes
10. Senator Terrence "Positive" Nelson -- Yes
11. Senator Nellie Rivera-O'Reilly -- Yes
12. Senator Clarence Payne -- Yes
13. Senator Tregenza A. Roach -- Yes
14. Senator Sammuel Sanes -- Yes
15. Senator Janette Millin Young -- Yes

The bill, championed by Senator Terrence "Positive" Nelson, was sent to de Jongh for further consideration. Nelson said it was wrong for the Governor to use public money to conduct work on his private property.

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