

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Basil Ottley: People Who Say I'm Not Eligible Are "Grasping At Straws" - The Big Interview

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Ernice Gilbert **October 11, 2014**



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As part of the VI Consortium's [big interview](#) with Delegate to Congress and 2014 gubernatorial candidate, Donna M. Christensen, I also had a chance to speak with the Congresswoman's running mate, Basil Ottley, who spoke passionately about the Virgin Islands, the vision that he and Christensen have to heal the territory's ailing economy, a strategy to awaken St. Croix's tourism product, whether he was prepared to be governor

should the occasion arise, and the controversy surrounding his eligibility to run for office in the United States Virgin Islands.

I think we look at St. Croix as being the future of the Virgin Islands because of the great opportunities of space being available, and some of its tremendous assets. The deep natural ports that are here, the broadband connectivity, the large amounts of flat, arable land -- the potential of St. Croix is phenomenal, and we want to make sure that that investment is made to raise all the boats in the Virgin Islands.

Q: *St. Croix, while beautiful, at the same time, we are hurting. I just spoke to the Delegate, [she has] a lot of ideas for St. Croix [and] of course you are from St. Thomas. We've seen St. Thomas be the beneficiary of many great ideas, businesses -- everything seems to be going to St. Thomas.*



supporting the Delegate's mission to see St. Croix's

Ernice Gilbert interviews Basil Ottley, Donna Christensen's

running mate.

Ottley: Well of course we are a team, and it's been our perspective that, in order to move the Virgin Islands forward, serious investments have to be made into St. Croix's economy. I think we look at St. Croix as being the future of the Virgin Islands because of the great opportunities of space being available, and some of its tremendous assets. The deep natural ports that are here, the broadband connectivity, the large amounts of flat, arable land -- the potential of St. Croix is phenomenal, and we want to make sure that that investment is made to raise all the boats in the Virgin Islands.

We cannot move forward as a territory until St. Croix is given strong attention and we can release all of its great potential.

Q: *Very good. Very convincing, by the way. [But] we've heard it in the past.*

Ottley: This is the real deal right now.

Q: *I've looked at the Delegate's plan as it relates to building the economy of the Virgin Islands. We've already identified St. Croix as being the island hurting the most. What are some of the ideas you bring to the table for St. Croix?*

Ottley: One of the things I think we need to do on all three islands is focusing on redevelopment of our historic towns, [because] right now, the base of all our economy is tourism. We have to begin reinvesting in those assets that make us unique and special, and that goes to our old towns.

There's no place in the Caribbean more beautiful than Frederiksted, Christiansted, Charlotte Amalie, Cruise Bay, Coral Bay -- we have some tremendous assets that we've neglected, and we're saying it's time to put some effort into bringing these places to be a center of activity.



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Q: *Right. So you look at St. Croix, we look at Frederiksted, we're on the dock here [and] its beautiful. Yet still the cruise ships are mostly in St. Thomas.*

Ottley: The cruise ship industry has changed and St. Thomas is feeling the impact of that right now. The ships are larger, there's duty-free on the ships so folks are not coming off the boat as they used to. You're getting a different demographic of persons traveling, you're not having the heyday of the cruise ship industry. The world has changed. People [are now] shopping over the internet globally, and so the model has changed, and we've always said that where the money is, is in that overnight visit. And we've kind of lost some grounds on that in St. Thomas, and we definitely have not explored its great potential here on St. Croix.

People have said, 'Oh, you were not here' and all of that type of stuff, but what they keep missing is what establishes your bona fide residency in this situation, is where you vote. I think it's title 3 Chapter 13, Section 201 -- and I can get the Code wrong, but there's a particular section of the VI Code that speaks to people who are employees of the Virgin Islands, or employees of the federal government who, because of their employment, they were required to leave. The Code says as long as these folks maintain their bona fide residency in the Virgin Islands by not voting in any other place, they are legally accepted as bona fide residents of the Virgin Islands.

When you look at what happens in St. John, [it has] about 750 villas, when it comes to this season during Christmas, all of them are gone. That's overnight stays. That's not a cruise ship industry -- and that's a powerful thing because that money circulates and [is] spent, so it means us building up that local infrastructure to capture it.

When we think of tourism, we think it's about people coming here and laying on our beaches and everything like that. Tourism is trade, [and] it's our responsibility, that when that market gets here, we need to be putting our goods in their hands. When they are in our restaurants, we should be trying to make sure that the eggs they eat are produced from a local farmer right here. The bacon they eat, is from a grass-fed pig (laughs) right here in the Virgin Islands. The difference is, instead of having to prepare your product and find a middleman to get it out there into the world, you're cutting the middle man out, you're bringing your market here to you.

Q: *You've seen some controversy as it relates to you being on the ballot. Some claim that you should not be because you haven't been in the territory for a long enough time -- although you are a Virgin Islander.*

Ottley: When you're desperate you have to draw at straws.

Q: *So you think it's desperation?*

Ottley: Total desperation.

Q: *Can you explain?*



Ernice Gilbert interviews Basil Ottley, Donna

Christensen's running mate.

Ottley: People have said, 'Oh, you were not here' and all of that type of stuff, but what they keep missing is what establishes your bona fide residency in this situation, is where you vote. I think it's title 3 Chapter 13, Section 201 -- and I can get the Code wrong, but there's a particular section of the VI Code that speaks to people who are employees of the Virgin Islands, or employees of the federal government who, because of their employment, they were required to leave. The Code says as long as these folks maintain their bona fide residency in the Virgin Islands by not voting in any other place, they are legally accepted as bona fide residents of the Virgin Islands.

[Former Ambassador Terrence Toddman](#) -- I don't know if many people knew this, I learned it at this funeral, [but] with all of his travels and travails throughout the world, he never gave up his domicile in the Virgin Islands. He continued to vote in the Virgin Islands.

And this particular law was put in place in 1968. Why? The folks of that time looked at Virgin Islanders, young Virgin Islanders, men and women, going off to gain experience that could be useful one day to the Virgin Islands, and they wanted to make sure that if those folks ever chose to come back, that we could embrace them, use them and benefit from their talent. Like I said, it was pure desperation, the law has always been on our side.

Many thanks to Delegate Donna Christensen and her running mate, Basil Ottley, for taking time out of their busy schedules to join VI Consortium for this interview. We also would like to thank Strictly the Best for providing Ernice Gilbert's wardrobe.

Special thanks to VI Consortium's Video Editor, Kendall Jones.