

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Governor John De Jongh Holds Cabinet Meeting

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Cynthia Graham **October 30, 2014**



As he makes final preparations to leave office at the end of the year, Governor John P. de Jongh, Jr. on Wednesday morning held a two-hour meeting with members of his Cabinet, comprised of the commissioners and directors of the various Executive Branch departments and agencies, to provide an update on government operations and other matters, as well as receive reports from Cabinet members.

Office of Management and Budget Director Debra Gottlieb, in her report on the government's financial condition, said that as a result of cash flow shortages, budget allotments will continue to be released on a month-to-month basis. Furthermore, she noted that the current budget does not adequately address payment of outstanding employer contributions to the Government Employees Retirement System, lump-sum

annual leave payments to employees that have left and/or are ready to leave government service, and for hiring essential employees. Gottlieb went on to say that Executive Branch agencies have remained current in utility payments to the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority.

"In OMB's analysis, the Fiscal Year 2015 is not balanced but we believe the 30th Legislature will consider additional measures to more align the budget," she said, projecting a \$100 million shortfall in the budget. She also pointed out that several agencies' budgets have been reduced below the levels proposed by the Governor in his submission of the budget earlier this year.

Senior Policy Advisor Richard T. Evangelista provided an update on several areas of the de Jongh Administration's focus, including economic development, education and public safety.

"We are working to complete as many of these priorities," Evangelista said.

He continued: "We have seen significant progress as well in areas of energy: the implementation of solar power systems for WAPA, the hospitals and correctional facilities. A significant advance for us has also been the adoption of the electronic records management systems at the Department of Health; the automation of tax collection efforts of the Bureau of Internal Revenue; reversing federal audit findings at VITEMA; consent decrees at VIPD, BOC have all seen forward movement and overall progress." Evangelista also spoke of success in closing ADA cases that were inherited when the Administration named the first ever Territorial ADA Coordinator in the person of Stephanie Barnes. "We have also worked efficiently with our counterparts from the British Virgin Islands on issues of mutual concern. The Inter Virgin Islands Council is working well for the benefit of our territories."

Regarding the recent sale of HOVENSA, de Jongh told his Cabinet that elected leaders should work diligently in order to "resume economic activity at the refinery, which should pick up as soon as the sale of the refinery is closed and the Senate approves the operating agreement." The Operating Agreement was signed by de Jongh and the refinery's new owners Wednesday afternoon and submitted to the 30th Legislature for review and consent.

De Jongh also introduced Susan Lugo, territorial archivist, DPNR Division of Libraries, Archives and Museums, who will be developing a protocol for records management and record retention in the Executive Branch. A host of other commissioners and government agencies also provided reports.

At the end of the session, De Jongh thanked Cabinet members for their service during his two terms as governor.

"We have been through some tough times over the last several years and I thank each of you for sticking with us and giving Cecile and I the support we have needed throughout our journey together," he concluded.