

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## Collens, Nicholson-Doty Nominations Approved By Rules And Judiciary Committee

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Cynthia Graham **February 17, 2015**



The Committee on Rules and Judiciary, chaired by Sen. Kenneth Gittens, approved Gov. Kenneth Mapp's nominations to appoint Valdamier O. Collens as the Commissioner of the Dept. of Finance and Beverly Nicholson-Doty as the Commissioner of the Dept. of Tourism.

The vote took place last Thursday during the committee's first meeting at the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall in St. Thomas.

All seven committee members voted in favor of Collens appointment and Nicholson-Doty received six yeas. One member was absent.

In his testimony, Collens said the duties entrusted to the commissioner are "tremendous" and can only be successfully executed with the help of a competent team, which he says he has. However, he pointed out that there are significant opportunities for improvement where more "human capital" will be necessary.

"I pledge to the people of the Virgin Islands that the department will be markedly improved under my tutelage," he said during his statement. "Furthermore, it is imperative that any concerns attributed to the department does not go unnoticed."

Senators Justin Harrigan and Janette Millin Young, the committee vice chair, asked Collens about transparency and the department's willingness to work with lawmakers, given the departments history of withholding information.

"We can't decide how much to spend, how to appropriate, if we don't know," Millin Young said. Collens said he was fully willing to work in an open and transparent manner with the Senate.

Senators Gittens, Nereida O'Reilly and Kurt Vialet inquired about the eight vacancies Collens made known were available within the Dept. of Finance and about how the jobs would be distributed throughout the territory. The St. Croix representatives said that most, if not all of the jobs, should go to residents living in the St. Croix District. To that, Collens said he would give St. Croix highest priority when filling the positions. He did not make known what the positions were.

Senate President Neville James told Collens he did not approve of his high salary increase, going from \$97,000 in his prior position as CFO at the Port Authority to \$125,000 as Finance Commissioner, an increase of some \$28,000, putting him at the same salary of the lieutenant governor.

"The public has a problem processing the governor, on one hand, saying that we're short on money but at the same time making raises available. There is a contradiction there," he said, noting that it is not a question of worth, as Collens' portfolio shows his qualifications. "However," James added, "the government has the responsibility to put in place a government we can afford."

Nicholson-Doty spoke about the territory's tourism product in prepared testimony.

"Tourism continues to be a primary economic driver for our territory and will be for the foreseeable future," she said, adding, "As an established destination in the region, facing a changing competitive landscape and increasingly demanding consumers, we must seek to change the barometer of success."

The Committee also considered Lawrence Olive's nomination for the position of Director of the Bureau of Motor Vehicles. During the vote however, a quorum could not be reached and with Gittens' discretion, Olive's nomination will be re-considered during the next Committee on Rules and Judiciary meeting, scheduled for Thursday, Feb. 19 at 9 a.m.

Both Collens' and Doty-Nicholson's votes will be forwarded to the full body for further consideration.

Committee members include Senators Kenneth Gittens, Jean Forde, Novelle Francis, Justin Harrigan, Neville James, Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly, and Janette Millin-Young.

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