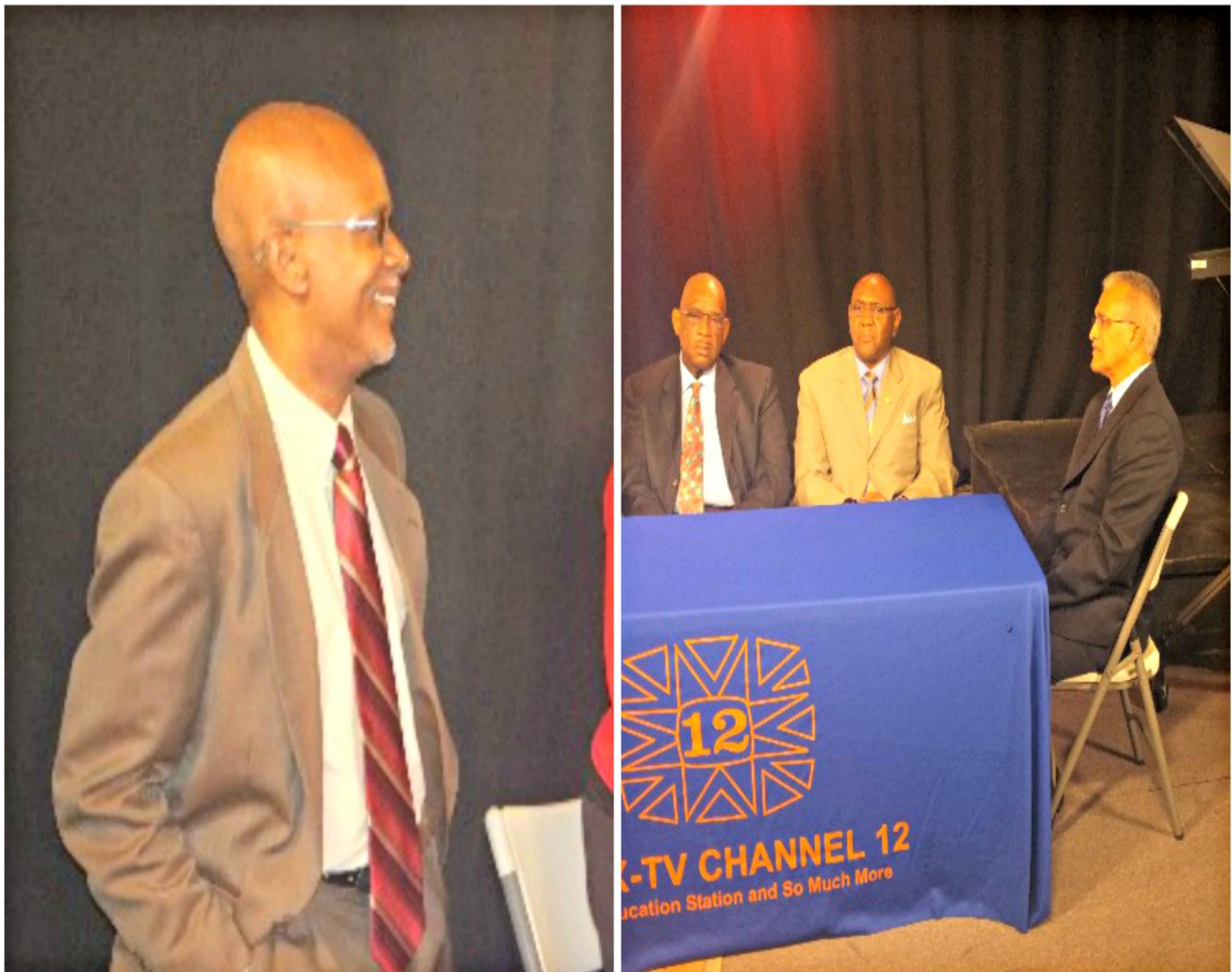


The Virgin Islands Consortium

Pickering, Carrington, Cruz , Richards Approved By Rules Committee

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Ernice Gilbert **February 27, 2015**



As the Committee on Rules and Judiciary, chaired by Senator Kenneth L. Gittens, continues its confirmation hearings of Mapp nominees, the latest round of hearings on Feb. 25 and 26 highlighted a host of issues facing the respective departments for which the nominees -- Marvin Pickering, Devin Carrington, Pedro Cruz and Delroy Richards -- have been tapped to head.

Director-designee of the Virgin Islands Bureau of Internal Revenue (IRB) Marvin Pickering made known his plans to rectify issues facing the bureau; Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs Commissioner-designee Devin Carrington took a strong stance in support of consumers; Pedro Cruz, commissioner-designee of the Department

of Sports, Parks and Recreation (SP&R) revealed that he would like his legacy as commissioner to be characterized by the stance he intends to take for the territory's youth; and Delroy Richards, commissioner-designee of the Virgin Islands Police Department (VIPD) promised to fuse old protocols with new ideas and technology to enhance the department's crime-fighting efforts.

Pickering said the U.S. Internal Revenue Service has offered to provide the territory with a few of its trainers to train his staff. He said the Government of the Virgin Islands will absorb the cost of travel, lodging and payroll for the training period.

In addressing the process of income tax refunds, according to Pickering, one of IRB's most significant measurements in the eyes of the public is how quickly refunds are paid. He said challenges such as incorrect Social Security numbers, disallowance of dependents, or other improperly claimed tax credits are some of the reasons for the delays. In other instances, he said, a lack of resources on the part of the bureau due to staffing shortages are to blame.

The committee was told that so far in Fiscal Year 2015, refunds totaling \$11.1 million and comprising 4,600 units of 2013 and prior years have been paid. In addition, Pickering said as of Friday, Feb. 20, 2015, the bureau has approximately 5,100 units with refunds totaling \$11.6 million ready, once the Department of Finance sends the request for the release of the schedule. He added the objective is paying all refunds every year by June 1.

In discussing his plans for IRB's criminal investigation division, Pickering said he hopes to hire a chief to go after persons under-reporting or not reporting their income.

In his testimony, Carrington said he would not back down in his efforts to ensure consumers are treated fairly. Unlike Wayne Biggs, DLCA's former commissioner who successfully concentrated his efforts on ensuring the department's licensing component was fully computerized, Carrington said he would focus on the department's consumer affairs component.

Cruz, who the Senate body commended for giving a thorough testimony about the state of DSP&R, spoke about reviving various sporting programs in the territory that had either faded or shuttered altogether.

Cruz said he intends to provide physical fitness, diverse sports and recreational programs to the Virgin Islands, as well as to ensure safe and well-maintained recreational facilities where young people, adults and seniors can enjoy their participation.

In reference to the facilities where sporting programs are being held in the territory, Cruz said the department needs more maintenance employees in order to ensure facilities are kept in good condition.

"Serious problems have arisen, especially in the facility and fields that can jeopardize the programs' effectiveness. We are facing some serious issues which we must stop [so] we won't have to face costly expenditures," Cruz said.

He added: "As I mentioned before, DSP&R is lacking some skilled maintenance employees that are needed to keep the facilities at good standard levels. Many of our

facility problems are aging [equipment] and vandalism."

Because of inadequate funding, Cruz said his department has been unable to maintain its facilities as it should.

"Additionally, a lack of funds has affected the agency's ability to manage, repair and maintain facilities and grounds on a regular basis," he said.

Cruz also offered ideas to keep facilities and parks secure.

"To maintain our parks and facilities to good standard, we must provide adequate equipment and supplies, and also increase security measures so as with the installation of video and motion sensor cameras."

Richards, a veteran of the VIPD who has served as territorial chief in the past, spoke in length about his intentions under the Mapp administration.

"Less than two months ago, I inherited the helm of the Virgin Islands Police Department, and also immediately, I initiated an assessment to determine the department's crime-fighting capabilities, as well as it's many other challenges," Richards said.

He continued: "I chose crime-fighting capabilities, because I believe this concern is at the forefront of the minds of every citizen in this territory.

"I'm also very cognizant of the most recent upsurge of violence in the territory, and I would first like to assure you that the police department is working vigorously to ensure that this community is not held hostage by a small group of violent perpetrators," Richards said.

All four nominees were approved by the Rules Committee and their names were sent to the full Body for further consideration.