

The Virgin Islands Consortium

De Jongh: Catherineberg Not Adequate To Accommodate Governor With Family

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ST. THOMAS -- Former Governor John P. de Jongh on Saturday issued a public statement announcing his payment of \$202,831.60 to the Government of the Virgin Islands for a guard house and security fence erected at his Mafolie property upon entering office in 2007.

In the statement, aside from explaining the events that lead to government expenditures at his private residence, de Jongh touched on the topic of abode for the current and future governors, and said that Catherineberg does not have the proper living quarters to accommodate a governor and his family.

De Jongh also expressed gratitude to those who supported his tenure in office.

Here's the full statement from the territory's 7th elected governor:

At the beginning of my first term in office, I made a commitment to the community that my family and I would not benefit from any of the security measures installed by the Government on my private property after I left office. I committed to pay to the Government the present-value of whatever security measures were to remain on my property after my term in office. Accordingly, I delivered to the Department of Property and Procurement a check for the value of the security measures that will remain on my property. This payment was made in fulfillment of my commitment, first announced years ago and confirmed in a February 15, 2010 letter released to the public. At no time have I wavered in fulfilling this commitment.

When I was first elected to serve as your Governor, I lived in my home on St. Thomas with my wife, my three school-aged children, and my wife's elderly aunt who we cared for at our home. There was not then any government-owned residence that could accommodate a family. The option of living with my family at Estate Catharineberg while serving as your Governor was not practical. As splendid as that property may be, it did not then – and does not now – have living quarters to accommodate a Governor with a family which includes children. I was advised that to renovate Estate Catharineberg for a family would require well over a year of construction at an estimated cost in excess of \$1.5 million; this to a property that had been substantially renovated and re-decorated only a few years earlier. I also was informed that the estimated annual housing expenses to be incurred at Catharineberg would be \$80,000 per year, which over the course of my eight year tenure as your Governor would have cost upwards of \$640,000. Simply put, the costs associated with moving my family into Catharineberg would have meant an expenditure in excess of \$2.1 million of taxpayer money.

I did not consider the cost for such major renovations to the property or the additional annual costs associated with my residing at Catharineberg to be appropriate. And so I decided to remain at my personal residence – my family's home – where we had lived, where my children would not be disrupted from their normal routines, and where we would be able to continue to comfortably live as a family.

With that decision made, I was informed by those officials charged with the duty of protecting and transporting the Governor that certain security measures to my residence were required. These security modifications consisted of providing shelter for officers assigned to the premises, a camera system, as well as secure fencing and parking for official vehicles.

The then-Acting Attorney General provided a written opinion that such security measures were in compliance with Virgin Islands law. The scope, design, cost, bidding, and construction of these security measures were not controlled or directed by anyone in my family or by me. They were undertaken in adherence with and subject to the long-established standard public procurement and government contracting processes. What was done and how it was done has been well-documented and made available for public review.

As I approached the end of my second term as Governor, the Department of Property and Procurement completed the established process for obtaining appraisals or valuations for public purposes.

The amount reimbursed was based on the averaging of the appraised values presented by three independent, licensed appraisers commissioned by the Department of Property and Procurement. I had no role in selecting the appraisers or directing their work. The value of the security measures was determined to be \$222,631.60, and I accepted the valuation.

I now have paid to the Government of the Virgin Islands the sum of \$202,831.60 which is the appraised, fair market value of the security measures that remain at my home, reduced by the cost of removing a now no longer required guard house from the property. The cost to remove the guard house was provided by an estimate from the Department of Public Works, and I have accepted that estimated cost and the obligation to remove the guard house.

I have no doubt that the approach I took to resolving the questions presented at the beginning of my first term in office with respect my housing arrangements as well as my security and transportation minimized the overall costs to the Government and the taxpayers of our Territory. Rather than spend large sums for the renovation and modification of Estate Catharineberg, that property was used throughout my term in office to host official meetings, community events, support charities, host Easter Egg hunts for children, conferences, receptions, and was also opened for tours. Living in my own home, I personally paid all the normal expenses associated with maintaining a home such as utilities, housekeeping, as well as the costs of caring for, feeding and sheltering my family.

Based now on objectively established numbers, the Government's net expense for security measures undertaken was \$250,097. This equates to \$31,262.05 for each year I served in office as your Governor.

Lastly, I would like to note that the same housing dilemma that confronted my family when I was elected Governor, also confronted my predecessors, presently confronts our current Governor, and will confront future governors unless a solution is attained through the political process. How and where the community decides it wishes to house and protect our Governor is a matter of public policy. Whether to house the Governor at a government-owned residence or have the decision made on a case-by-case basis following each election, the decision should not be a matter of partisan politics for anyone elected to serve as Governor. I trust that the community will soon determine a housing policy for the future.

It was my considerable honor to have had the duties and responsibilities of service as your Governor. The fact that my Administration had to govern during one of the most difficult economic times experienced by our country and our Territory was a challenge I accepted. It was a time of tremendous change here at home, in the United States, and throughout the world.

Once again, I wish to thank the many individuals who worked with me, who supported my Administration's efforts, and all in the community who participated, whether it was by

voting, by volunteering, or by voicing your concerns or, in some cases, even stating opposition to the policies my Administration pursued. Our elected government works best when we all are involved.

I offer my best wishes to Governor Kenneth E. Mapp and Lieutenant Governor Osbert E. Potter and all those who now have the honor of fulfilling the duties and responsibilities of public service to the people of our Territory.

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