

The Virgin Islands Consortium

OMB Director Nominee Approved By Senate Despite Length Of Commitment Concerns

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Ernice Gilbert **May 16, 2015**



ST. THOMAS -- Governor Kenneth Mapp nominations for Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Public Service Commission (PSC), Nellon Bowry and former Sen. Donald Cole, respectively, made it through the Committee on Rules and Judiciary, chaired by Sen. Kenneth "Kenny" Gittens during a hearing on Friday morning at the Earl B. Ottley Legislative Hall.

Bowry, whose testimony spoke of an economy that is still struggling to recover from the economic recession of 2008, compounded by the closure of the HOVENSA refinery in 2012, called on the senate to create legislation that would see the government moving away from yearly budgeting obligations to a multi-year system.

"The structural adjustments that must be made to eliminate the structural imbalance cannot be accomplished in a one-year planning horizon," Bowry said. "We cannot fix the underlying imbalance in fiscal year 2016, in 2016. By then it's too late to do anything but stopgap measures and to borrow more money."

According to Bowry, for the territory to get a handle on its financial woes, the balancing of 2016's budget should be laid out in a five-year road map.

"I believe it's time that we move to a multi-year budgeting plan where the current budget is presented, reviewed and analyzed in the context of a five-year fiscal plan," he said.

If approved, the director nominee said he would challenge himself and his staff at OMB to "be the catalysts for this change."

Bowry, who asked the senate to consider his approval, has only committed to serving one year as director. The awareness of Bowry's planned stay at OMB became an issue for legislators, who argued that 12 months was not enough time to affect change at the department.

Sen. Janet Millin Young in particular, who also serves as vice chair of the Rules and Judiciary Committee, was pointed in her concern.

Million Young made mention of Governor Mapp's remarks about Bowry's length of stay at OMB if approved, when the governor suggested that Bowry's tenure may go well past 12 months because he's operating on "Crucian time."

"I want you to explain what does "Crucian time" means here in terms of a year, and has anything really changed. Because I believe that a person who is in a position that requires some length of longevity, operates differently when he believes he's going for six months, when he's going in for a year, or his going in for three, four or five," Million Young said.

"What I could tell you is that my commitment to the governor is for one year, as of today," Bowry responded.

Senator-after-senator, while confident that Bowry had the experience to execute his duties effectively, expressed concern about his one-year commitment. Nonetheless, the full committee, bar Sen. Gittens, approved Bowry's nomination. Gittens said he could not bring himself to support Bowry because he did not get a commitment from the director nominee to serve past 12 months.

Bowry will now face the full body for its approval.

Following Bowry's favorable hearing, the committee took on Cole, probing the former senator, who lost his seat in the 2014 General Election, on his role at PSC in lowering utility rates and helping with broadband internet rates, among other PSC-related concerns.

Cole was supported by all members of the committee (two were absent during roll call), and his nomination forwarded to the full senate body.

"Mr. chair, members on the Committee on Rules and Judiciary, I really want to thank you for the vote, and thank you for the probing questions. I pledge to you that I would use all of the knowledge that I've gleaned to lead the staff of the PSC and represent the governor and lieutenant governor, who nominated me here, that we can bring the rate of electricity down," Cole said.

All members of the Rules and Judiciary committee were present at Friday's hearing.

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