

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Casino Control Commission Says Territory 'Squandering' Lifetime Opportunity In Internet Gaming

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ST. CROIX -- Chairwoman of the Virgin Islands Casino Control Commission (CCC), Violet Ann Golden, testified at a Senate Committee on Finance hearing at the Fritz Lawetz Conference Room in the Frederiksted Legislative building on Monday, and stated that the territory was "squandering" a major opportunity to capitalize on internet gaming by not crafting legislation to facilitate the fast-growing industry, and making available funds for the commission to develop the sector.

"The commission is anxious to launch internet gaming," Golden said under oath. "The prospects of creating a new e-commerce destination is of great urgency and important to the long-term economic development growth of the territory, and the commission is ready

to act."

Internet gaming, also known as online gambling, has become one of the most popular and lucrative businesses present on the World Wide Web, with various Caribbean islands having already incorporated the revenue-generating industry into their economies and seeing billions of dollars in profits as a result.

But the territory's legislators need to create laws to better facilitate the industry's growth, according to Golden.

"Once we collect the funds necessary to carry out these important initiatives, and the legislature address the master provider issues, we will proceed with our plans to implement internet gaming in the territory," Golden said, adding, "I must say, though, that the Virgin Islands is squandering an opportunity of a lifetime by not modernizing our internet gaming statute. The time to act in the interest of our beloved territory is now."

During a questioning round, Golden told St. Croix Democrat Kurt Violet that Europe was very interested in an online gaming partnership with the Virgin Islands, and that Denmark, former owner of the territory, is one of the richest online gaming jurisdictions in the world. Violet said speeding up the process to get the ball rolling should be priority for the Senate. He also said he would take a closer look at [legislation sponsored](#) by Sen. Nereida "Nellie" Rivera-O'Reilly and [vetoed](#) by former Governor John P. de Jongh, that sought to allow business owners in Christiansted and Frederiksted to obtain a special license to build and operate casinos in the island's two historic towns.

Speaking on funding, Golden said over \$1 million is owed the CCC from a variety of sources.

"We under-collected approximately \$100,000 a year for the past 13 years or approximately \$1.3 million, and we are not pleased with this finding," she said, "and I have taken the necessary action to correct the problem immediately."

On funding, Golden said operating expenses, which is supported by the Casino Revenue Fund totaled \$1.4 million; while personnel costs, which is supported by the general fund totaled \$1.2 million. This brings CCC's total operating budget for fiscal year 2016 to \$2.6 million.

The chairwoman also revealed that for the past two years, the CCC has been without key staff, including an executive director, who she announced at yesterday's hearing as Malcolm McGregor, a former John P. de Jongh advisor, "after two years and 40 interviews of qualified Virgin Islanders."