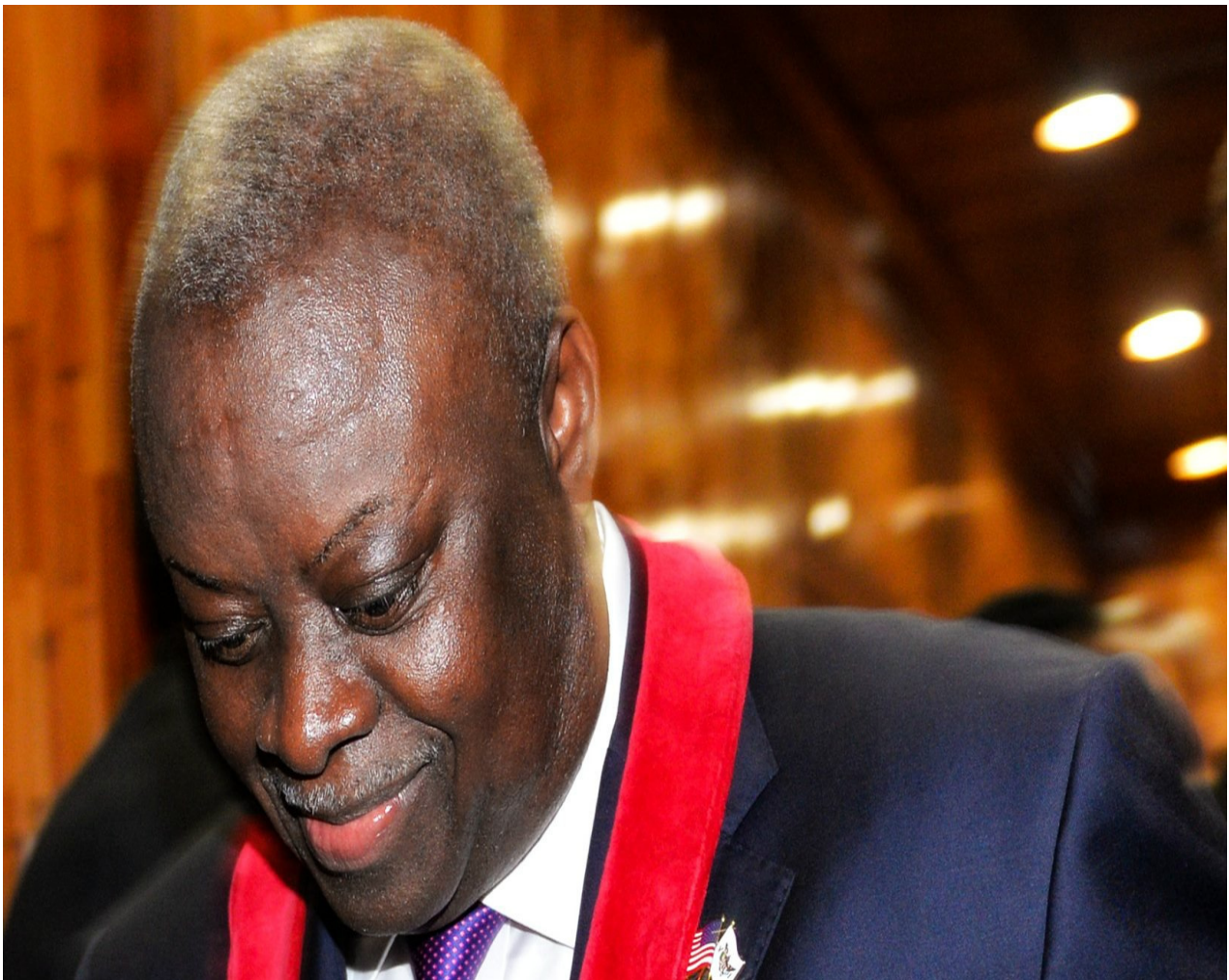


The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp's 2016 Budget Request Includes Increased Travel Expenses, Three New Limousines, An Executive Chef And More

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ST. THOMAS -- High-ranking members of the Kenneth Mapp administration testified under oath at the Earl B. Ottley Legislative Hall on Wednesday, seeking a 2016 budget of \$9.3 million.

Making the governor's case before the Committee on Finance was Nellie Varlack, director of business and administration, along with members of the Bureau of Economic Research.

Varlack said the \$9.3 million budget includes \$8.3 million for funding the Office of the Governor and \$710,033 for the research bureau, which represents a 3 percent decrease from last year's budget.

"To enable us to efficiently reallocate resources to address the needs of the Office of the Governor, we respectfully ask to be granted a lumpsum budget which will give us the flexibility to ensure that we place available resources where they are most needed," Varlack said.

She added that Governor Mapp remains committed to building "a sound, stable financial economic and social environment that will enhance the welfare of all the people of the Virgin Islands."

Varlack and her team, which also included Dr. Simon Jones-Hendrickson, did not receive much push back from finance committee members, chaired by Sen. Clifford Graham. However, members of Mapp's Bureau of Economic Research team fielded criticism from members of the committee, who argued that the bureau was not properly doing its job of collecting important data that could effectively dictate the direction in which the territory should be headed.

Nonetheless, senators generally asked pertinent questions, including an explanation as to why the governor needed three new limousines costing \$120,000 in total; a reason for the increase in travel expenses; and the hiring of an executive chef being paid \$65,000 annually, who Mapp's Communications Director, Kimberly Jones, told *The Consortium* prepares meals not only for the governor, but also for the executive staff at Government House.

In justifying the need for the new vehicles, Varlack said maintenance for the current ones had become expensive and it made better financial sense to purchase the new limousines: one on St. Croix and St. Thomas for the governor, and another for the Lieutenant Governor. Varlack did not specify on which island Osbert Potter's limousine would be stationed.

"We are seeing an increase in travel," Varlack said, responding to a question from Sen. Nereida "Nellie" O'Reilly, who asked why travel expenses had increased from \$198,000 to \$403,500.

"Our senior leadership team is based on St. Croix, so we have a little bit more frequent travel between the islands, in addition to hotel stays as well. And it's the governor's aim to train employees of the Office of the Governor in their respective fields as well, so additional monies were included for that," Varlack added.

Varlack listed the governor's top priorities as reorganizing the governance structure; the institutionalization of greater fiscal responsibility for revenues and expenditures; orchestrating a more aggressive mode in the tax-collection process; developing a strong relationship with the Office of the Delegate to Congress; and adopting an aggressive approach to ensure that the Virgin Islands interests are protected.

In relation to progress made, Varlack said the administration has fostered a strong relationship with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); made "significant and steady progress in issuing tax refunds to tax payers for 2013 and prior years," bar those

being audited; and reestablished relationships with federal partners "to develop and implement aggressive strategies to obtain and retain federal funds," among other important headway.

Number one on the governor's list for goals in 2016 includes growing the anemic economy, Varlack said. Mapp also intends to make major infrastructure investments, expand services and outreach to the mentally ill, and launch agricultural initiatives like farm-to-table lunches in the territory's schools.

Varlack's full testimony, along with the governor's budget breakdown, can be seen [here](#).