

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Administration Says 'Security Concerns' Led To Potter's Condo Rental

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ST. CROIX -- Property and Procurement Acting Commissioner Randolph Bennett told members of the Committee on Rules and Judiciary on Monday that the Governor Kenneth Mapp administration secured a condominium in St. Thomas for Lieutenant Governor Osbert Potter because of "security concerns." Bennett also said that he did not view the new rental as a "stretch" for the community.

The acting commissioner, who senators eventually gave a favorable nod and moved his appointment from Rules to the full Senate, gave historical background in an attempt to explain why the decision was made to provide housing for the Lieutenant Governor in the territory's capital, when he already has a home there.

"The most recent questions about the lieutenant governor's property is that we have looked at the cost and done some analysis on what it costs for the lieutenant governor to move back and forth in the territory when he's here in St. Croix, where he spends most of his time. come back to St. Thomas and where his private residence is located and [we] erns," Bennett said.



Acting Property and Procurement

Commissioner Randolph Bennett.

Bennett conceded that the administration did not adequately communicated its intention to provide housing for the lieutenant governor in St. Thomas. He also said his experience of managing properties and residences for ambassadors around the world and the level of funding that had to be expended to support these tasks, "it didn't seem as such a far stretch for me for this community," he said.

Sen. Gittens, chairman of the committee, asked Bennett where in the Virgin Islands Code did he identify provision for security or housing for the lieutenant governor.

Bennett said while the original or revised code never specifically mentioned the lieutenant governor, it made mention of the governor's secretary, "which, at that time, under the Revised Organic Act of 1936, was appointed and was provided residence here in the territory," he said. The acting commissioner also argued that the Revised Organic Act failed to make mention of housing for the lieutenant governor because said position was established in 1968 -- some 14 years after the original code was revised.

"So yes, it did not mention those things but the precedent has been set for residence for the governor's secretary," Bennett said.

Gittens, however, was not buying Bennett's argument: "You all continue to talk about precedents being set," said Gittens. "Those things on the main land and elsewhere land people in jail.

"There is nowhere that speaks to providing housing or security for that of the lieutenant governor. When we make these moves, we need to move according to the law and what the law calls for. Not what we believe it is."

Bennett told Gittens that legal advice was provided by former Acting Attorney General Terri Griffiths, and that he had just joined the administration during that time.

Aside from the housing issue, Bennett spoke about the initiatives he intends to introduce in efforts to streamline services at Property and Procurement. He also spoke of boosting

employee morale, and noted that while his employees work hard, it's been years since they've received pay raises. Bennett also spoke about cutting cost and saving time, and said he would delegate work to his assistant commissioners and other high-level employees to do tasks that don't necessarily need his attention.

The Rules and Judiciary Committee, which includes Gittens, Neville James, Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly, Justin Harrigan, Janette Millin Young and Novelle Francis, voted 6-1 in the affirmative, with only Sen. Millin Young recorded as absent.

Other nominees approved by the Rules committee on Monday were: Cedric Armstrong (owner of Armstrong Ice Cream) to serve as a member of the V.I. Taxi Cab Commission; and [Deborah Howell](#), to serve as Adjutant General of the Virgin Islands National Guard.