

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Firefighters Say Eugene Farrell Is Unpleasant To Work With

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ST. CROIX -- Firefighters gathered at the Cardiac Center located at the Juan F. Luis Hospital on Monday morning for a meeting with Virgin Islands Fire Service Acting Director Eugene Farrell, along with Governor Kenneth Mapp and other officials, to discuss problems firemen here have faced since the arrival of Farrell.

The behind-the-scenes tension was first [brought to the fore](#) at a recent Senate hearing, which prompted senators to send Farrell's candidacy unfavorably to the full body, where it is expected to fail.

The senators' decision was based on calls, emails and text messages they received from a myriad of residents, including VIFS employees, about Farrell's leadership style; stating that he was unpleasant to work with.

The same theme dominated today's meeting, where firemen again chided Farrell for what they deemed, so far, as failed leadership.

Firefighter George Otto said every director, upon being chosen to lead the department, has personally visited the island to speak to the men and women of the department. However, "your first encounter with us was on a teleconference. And in that teleconference, a statement was made by you [that] 'we don't want you to come over here,' because when you come, we won't want it.' That was your statement to us," Otto said to Farrell.

Otto went on, stating that Farrell, in his newly nominated position, doesn't seem to know how to talk to his employees, "and that's the main problem," he said. Then, looking at the director nominee intently, Otto said, "it's not just your style and how you do things, but your personality. Your personality stuck out like a sore thumb, and I'm not saying this to be disrespectful, but I'm going to say what's on my mind."

Otto added: "Your personality was very harsh and abrasive like you didn't care. And even when we told you about morale, a simple thing as coming here and changing our emblem without even asking the masses, that means something. That emblem is us, and you have to ask us what we feel about it. Regardless of what you said about St. Croix being touchy. We're not touchy, we're just real."

Farrell responded, as he did with every comment addressed to him, contending that during the teleconference, while it was believed that the mics were off, disparaging remarks about him were made from some firefighters here.

"Those who know me personally know that I can take criticism," Farrell began. "But when it borders on disrespect, that's where I basically draw the line. Because I will not tolerate any disrespect from anybody, and if I disrespect you, come forward and say [it]."

But Otto wasn't the only firefighter who spoke of Farrell as not having the right personality to lead the department. Fire Marshal Clifford Joseph, who said he'd never spoken to anyone about the director, said Farrell treats his suggestions as having no value.

"Anything that I bring to Farrell, I don't care if it's good, bad or indifferent, he just drops it 100 percent," Joseph said.

In giving an example, Joseph said while at a union meeting, he showed Farrell that prevention, according to Virgin Islands Code, should have two lieutenants, but Farrell told him that it's "based on what the director feels." A day later, Farrell approached Joseph and confessed to being wrong.

Joseph detailed other instances where Farrell displayed either a lack of urgency or lack of interest all together. And again, Farrell responded, only this time he publicly apologized to Joseph.

Even so, Joseph told Farrell that respect goes both ways, and he reminded the acting director of his demand that agendas be set before inviting him to meetings.

But "when the union was reaching out to you, you said you're not coming to no meeting without an agenda, so we would have preferred, when you're calling for a meeting, [that you set] an agenda on the table also," Joseph said. "It's only fair that whatever you want for yourself, you want for us. We want to be treated how we're supposed to be treated."

Governor Mapp, while exiting the meeting, told reporters that he didn't know if Farrell would succeed the scrutiny of the Senate. But he did say, "I want my director."

Other issues including compensation were addressed at the meeting, and the importance of balancing education with experience in the department. Governor Mapp pledged to at least resolve the compensation issue.

Feature Image: Acting Fire Director Eugene Farrell.

Image Credit: 31st Legislature of the U.S. Virgin Islands.