

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Says Statements From Gittens And Novelle Are Attacks Against Him; Gittens Says Farrell Misleading Governor

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And Sen. Novelle Francis stands by his statement.

ST. CROIX -- Governor Kenneth Mapp has responded to statements released by Senator Kenneth Gittens and Novelle Francis in relation to all St. Croix fire stations being closed on Monday, stating in an audio recording this afternoon that the releases represented attacks on him and holds no truth in regards to the [plenary meeting](#) called for Virgin Islands Fire Service employees at the Cardiac Center.

The meeting was organized to try and allay tensions between Acting Fire Director Eugene Farrell and the agency's employees. However, the meeting has garnered strong condemnation from senators who say the decision to shutter the fire stations was careless and dangerous.

For his part, Governor Mapp could not understand where the fury was coming from, or why it was happening in the first place.

"Let me assure the Virgin Islands community that under no circumstance was the public's safety at risk," Mapp said. The territory's leader said he noted in Gittens press release the concern that VIFS would not be able to respond while the meeting, which called for all firemen and women to be present, was taking place.

"I'm concerned and tremendously disappointed that both of the senators heralded such an attack on me and the Fire Service's director for having a plenary session," Mapp said. The governor then reminded that both Gittens and Novelle, along with himself, served in the police department, "and throughout our careers, on more than one occasion, we have been summoned to more than one plenary sessions that all police officers must attend."

The governor went on, stating that fire equipment, during the meeting, were stationed near the Cardiac Center in case of an emergency, and also reaffirmed that fire personnel had their communication devices with them and could respond to emergencies on the go.

The chief executive also highlighted the successful containment of a brush fire here yesterday that fire fighters responded to while at the meeting.

But in speaking to Gittens late Tuesday, the second-term senator defended his statement, and said while it's not his intention to get into a back-and-forth with the administration because the territory needs to move forward with economic development, the truth is, he said, all fire stations on St. Croix closed temporarily on Monday, and that was a poor call by Acting Fire Director Farrell, who, Gittens said, should "own up" to the mistake and stop misleading the governor.

Gittens said he made calls to the fire stations, and residents visited some only to find that they were shuttered. "It wasn't until inquiries started to be made that Farrell directed employees to reopen and man those stations while the meeting continued," Gittens said. "The governor seems to be standing in the corner of his nominee; but the nominee needs to be forthcoming with the governor and tell him exactly what took place."

Eurman Fahie, widely known as Coach Fahie, an activist who actively advocates for retirees, told *The Consortium* this afternoon that he visited the Christiansted Fire Station at 1:14 p.m. on Monday, only to find it, "completely locked down, tight."

He continued: "No one was present. What the governor is saying is the furthest thing from the truth. And for people to be lying and misinforming the public, that ain't right. When people see dishonesty and false information, knowing that it is false, how could you support somebody like that?"

The Consortium also spoke to Sen. Novelle Francis late Tuesday, and he too, held steadfast to his stance, but said it was time to move one.

"I am comfortable with my position, but it's a new day," Francis said. "If the governor said the public was not at risk, I'm happy for that."

Francis added that he was "surprised" by the decision to shutter, even temporarily, the fire stations, and said plenary meetings held in the police force would always see a few officers being excused to man those stations.

Even so, the freshman senator said he supports the governor's initiatives and does not wish to constantly challenge the chief executive -- especially during a time of economic crisis, when innovative ideas are needed to move the islands forward.

As for Farrell's nomination, Francis said bar a miracle, he will "absolutely vote no" again when the full Senate meets to decide the acting director's fate.

"I met with Farrell subsequent to [that Rules committee no vote], and he has done nothing to allay my concerns," Francis said.