

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bill Seeking To Raise UVI Medical School Debt Service From \$700,000 To \$1 Million Vetoed By Mapp

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Ernice Gilbert **October 11, 2015**



ST. CROIX --- Governor Kenneth Mapp has vetoed a measure that sought to raise the University of the Virgin Islands debt service being paid by the government through the Internal Revenue Matching Fund from \$700,000 to \$1 million, a setback UVI President Dr. David Hall said would affect the medical school's St. Croix development.

The extra \$300,000, Dr. Hall argued at a Senate hearing earlier this year, would permit the institution to "construct a facility that would train existing physicians, nurses, emergency medical technicians, other first responders and military personnel" at the simulation center here. But with Governor Mapp vetoing the measure that sought to provide the extra funding, UVI will only be able to build phase one of the facility on the

bigger of the three islands, while the complete structure in St. Thomas will be erected by funding already available.

Dr. Hall added that the extra money was time-sensitive because UVI needed to be able to convey to the U.S Dept. of Education that the resolution passed by the PFA had been translated into law, "so it's clearly something we'd like to get done so we're not in a vulnerable position in regards to the loan that we have taken out," he said.

The governor, in his written remarks following the veto, said the government would not support the extra financial burden.

"While I support the territory's medical school and have stated so publicly; I have made it clear to the leadership of the university that the central government cannot carry any additional financial burden for the medical school beyond the benefits we committed as of May 6, 2015," wrote the governor. "The leadership of the university agreed and indicated they were not seeking any additional financial support. In fact, UVI laid out its financial plan on how the medical school would be sustained financially without additional government support."

Aside from the governor, the 31st Legislature's Post Auditor Jose George came in opposition of the measure, stating that there was no money in the bill's funding source for the added \$300,000 UVI sought, and it was uncertain whether the funds would become available in fiscal year 2016. He also mentioned the debt's yearly reoccurring nature, hinting that it would be difficult for the government to find funds, for the next 30 years, to pay the debt.

In other action, Mapp vetoed Bill No. 31-0216—an act appropriating funds to the Virgin Islands Taxi Cab Commission for the fiscal year starting October 1, 2015 to September 30, 2016 for operating expenses.

"For too long, the Taxi Cab Commission has operated on the backs of hardworking and struggling taxi and tour operators through the issuance of fines, levies, and fees," Mapp said. "Taxi drivers and tour operators have been assessed penalties as high as \$1000.00 for first offense infractions that a non-taxi driver would be assessed a fine in traffic court of \$75.00. We cannot statutorily mandate that an agency regulate an industry and then that agency target the citizens it is regulating to collect sufficient revenues so the regulators can be paid."

The governor also vetoed Bill No. 31-0238, which provides funds for payment to members of the United Industrial Workers of North America, Seafarers International Union, AFL-CIO, and for the costs and fees for the disposition of the lawsuit, Harley, et al v. Government of the Virgin Islands, et al.

Mapp contends that the lawsuit is still active and pending before the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands, and it was not the first time that the language contained in the measure has appeared before him.

"The Legislature's appropriation of funds mandating the payment of such funds to settle a case which is still pending is a horrible precedent to set and not in the best interest of the people of the Virgin Islands," Mapp said.

