

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Senators Express Shock And Dismay At Shooting Death Of Hansen's Son

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ST. THOMAS -- At a Committee of the Whole hearing here at the Earl B. Ottley Legislative Hall on Wednesday, where members of the 31st Legislature gathered to hear testimony on zoning bills, senators started the night with a moment of silence for the shooting death of Ericksen Hansen, son of ten-term Senator Alicia "Chucky" Hansen, and expressed shock and dismay at what had happened, while sending condolences to the grieving family.

The moment of silence, which saw members of the Senate standing in quietude, was initiated by Senate President Neville James and kicked off what would be a flood of comments from legislators, as the death of Mr. Hansen struck close to home.

The flood of comments started with Senator Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly, who said that as a woman and a mother, her thoughts and prayers were with Mrs. Hansen and her family. Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly said that the news was "heartbreaking."

"I seldom ask for a point of personal privilege, but I think it's important that I do so as a mother, as a woman, and as someone who sat very close to Senator Hansen in the 30th Legislature," said Sen. Rivera-O'Reilly, visibly shaken by news of the homicide.

"I too join a saddened community in extending heartfelt condolences to Senator Chucky Hansen," Sen. Janette Millin Young, Senate vice president, added. "It was just yesterday that I saw her and we were talking about her children. She then began to explain to me about each of them and what was special about them, so I know that this morning, having heard the news, it was not just shocking to me, I'm sure it was shocking to many Virgin Islanders who love Chucky."

Freshman Democrat Senator Novelle Francis, a former police chief and police commissioner, went beyond just offering Mrs. Hansen condolences, but "all the other mother and father parents that are grieving today." Sen. Francis said he counted 9 homicide deaths in the territory "over the last several days."

"I think it's only fitting for the guardian and the individual that was responsible for public safety in this community, that I too continue to implore the Virgin Islands Police Department and law enforcement agencies to do all that they can to bring some speedy and quick resolution to this crime situation that we're experiencing," Mr. Francis said, further stating that the 31st Legislature is "willing to do anything possible to assist them in their endeavors to make this happen."

Another freshman Democrat, Senator Kurt Vialet, expressed condolences to Mrs. Hansen and also her husband, Mr. Esdel Hansen, Sr., and also to the surviving children.

"Any death in the Virgin Islands is very traumatic to the entire family, and we all know that Chucky Hansen, along with Esdel Hansen, is a pair. They come together and as one and I really have to send out my condolences to the family and also to the numerous other individuals who have been killed in the last two and a half weeks," Mr. Vialet said. He mentioned counting six individuals killed here in the last two weeks, "and that is a staggering number, and something that I hope we will be able to stop somehow, and I'm imploring to the community that we need to just stop this violence; it's just totally out of control. We've got to stop it," the senator concluded.

At-Large Senator Almando "Rocky" Liburd, who said he was able to correspond with Mrs. Hansen on Wednesday morning, joined the chorus of condolences to the Hansen family, but said talk was not enough, and that the violence in the territory was hitting closer to home.

"This situation that's happening in our community requires deep soul-searching and resilience on the part of a people as to this element of destruction in our community," Mr. Liburd began. "All of us in here understand the problem, and I know we're trying our best to solve it but it requires the entire population. And I've always said that it don't seem like we have any love in our hearts anymore."

He went on: "We continue to fight each other and the only thing we know to do is destroy; and so in my discussions with the senator, and afterward, we talked about many members who've gone through the same thing in this institution since I've been here, and the chickens are coming home very close. And folks, we as a people got to find some way to reach out and talk to our young people and talk to our community." Sen. Liburd said efforts must be applied to building a community that is family oriented, where violence is replaced with compassion.

And Senator Justin Harrigan called the homicide of Mrs. Hansen's son "astonishing," and said that he feels "almost helpless."

"We give the monies to the various departments to try and keep us safe, but it doesn't seem to be enough," Mr. Harrigan added. He said money was not the problem, "it has to be behavior, lack of respect for life, and I guess we as senators will have to try something different than just money." He also expressed his condolences.

"It is very difficult to bare the loss of a family member to gun violence in this community," Senator Myron Jackson began. Mr. Jackson said his father was "senselessly" killed in St. Thomas in 1982. "So, for my family, we live this everyday."

Mr. Jackson went on to express condolences to Mrs. Hansen and the other families "suffering in this territory for the senseless killing of people of color; especially our young men and our young boys."

He added: "It was not God's intention for us to kill each other in the manner that we are. We need a spiritual renewal. How we are going to achieve that is through some of the initiatives that we set in this institution, and especially preventative programs that we may save another generation. So I make an appeal to my colleagues to do all we can do in the policies that we shape, and also how we initiate funding for these programs."

Condolences were also shared by Senator Clifford Graham, the powerful chairman of the Committee on Finance, and Senators Marvin Blyde and Jean Forde. Senator Tregenza Roach abstained from commenting.

"This gun violence we are seeing in our community is not who we are as a people," Mr. Blyden said. "We have never been that way and we must find a way to deal with this type of violence. I see us in this territory these days as basically terrorizing each other, and that is not who we are. We have not been raised to be that way, so I do agree with my colleagues that we must find ways and means of tackling this problem," Blyden concluded.