

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Senator Harrigan Responds; Says Comments Were Made As 'Scenario'

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ST. CROIX -- Senator Justin Harrigan has issued a statement attempting to clarify comments he made during an October 23 Committee on Rules and Judiciary hearing, where he said any government official could "hit a bump in the road" and take government funds.

The bill, sponsored by Sen. Kenneth Gittens, is a measure that seeks to take away retirement benefits from government officials — including governors, lieutenant governors, commissioners, members of the Legislature, justices of the territory's Supreme Court, judges and magistrate judges of the Superior Court and other elected and appointed officials — who have been convicted of a crime or crimes involving public

corruption.

After being recognized by Committee Chairman Mr. Gittens, Sen. Harrigan, [discontent with the measure](#), said he would not support the bill in its current form because it should include all government employees, not only public officials.

"If you're trying to stamp out corruption in government, it doesn't necessarily start at the top," Mr. Harrigan said. "If we are going to select a group of people or persons and leave the majority of government workers unscathed, I really don't see how you could consider that fair."

He also suggested — as if it was okay to steal public funds — that any senator could take government money with the intent of returning those funds the following day.

"I have a very serious problem with this bill and the way it's structured," Mr. Harrigan said. "I don't think it's fair. Anyone of us could hit that bump in the road and decide we need to take some of the government's money for the weekend and then we're going to put it back the next day. So we must be very careful how we structure these pieces of legislation going forward."

But in responding to the article after being inundated with phone calls and queries from displeased residents, Mr. Harrigan, writing on his [Facebook page](#), said The Consortium, along with some of his colleagues, had taken his statement out of context.

"There has been much discussion about statements I made during a recent hearing of the Rules and Judiciary Committee hearing as we received testimony on Bill 31-0150, which sought to forfeit the retirement benefits of selected public officials convicted of certain crimes," Mr. Harrigan began. "During the hearing I mentioned that I was not in support of the bill as I viewed it as discriminatory and selective, in that I believe that all government employees, not just those at the top should be held liable for corruption. The bill only addresses those at the top, but would not penalize those in lower positions who committed such grievous crimes."

He continued: "In my round of questioning to the Acting Attorney General Claude Walker, I made a scenario, which was taken out of context by both the media and some of my colleagues. I said anyone of us could hit a bump in the road and decide to take the government's money and put it back the next day. This was merely a scenario to suggest that any employee could do that, so public officials should not be the only ones to be penalized. By no means do I condone corruptions, whether it is by a public official or regular employee of the government. Below is a clip of the hearing, feel free to listen to it, if you choose. Not everything we read in the media is accurate."

But Mr. Harrigan's statement did not explain how his comments were taken out of context, and he never alerted his colleagues and those testifying that he made those comments in an attempt to show forth a scenario. Furthermore, the senator only chose to clarify after the fallout, and not while in the chamber so as to leave no doubt in anyone's mind what he meant.

Below, a video showing Mr. Harrigan's at the hearing speaking on the matter.