

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Gittens Calls For State Of Emergency; Says Leaders Are Acting Like 'Nothing Is Happening'

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ST. THOMAS -- Senator Kenneth Gittens sidelined a discussion on zoning requests at a full Senate session at the Earl B. Ottley Legislative Hall on Tuesday, and focused his attention -- and passionate speech -- on the eruption of crime in the territory.

Mr. Gittens, a second-term Democrat and former law enforcement officer, assailed the Governor Kenneth Mapp administration for what he deems as its lack of urgency on the matter, and said leaders here are acting as if there was no criminal activity in the islands.

"We're acting like nothing is going on in this territory. And as we're supposed to be talking about economic development and shepherding these islands into prosperity, each and

everyday we're hearing about another shooting, about another death. It is sad and I want to take this opportunity once again to call on the administration and say let's meet and put our heads together so that we can address the crime situation that we're facing in this territory," Mr. Gittens said.

These thugs can move from east to west with these high-powered rifles in their possession because nobody is stopping them.

"I'm a resident here and I have no where [else] to go; and I'll be damned if I allow any thug to run me out of these islands," the lawmaker added.

Between Monday and Tuesday, [five people were shot](#) on St. Croix. Last Sunday night, a man was [gunned down](#), his body riddled with bullets, in St. Thomas. And last Friday, [five men were shot on St. Croix](#) -- a total of eleven shooting victims in four days.

For Mr. Gittens, who said he does not intend to allow "thugs" to takeover the territory, demanded that the administration move quickly to formulate a strategy. He's also made multiple requests, he said, to meet with Governor Mapp on the situation.

"I'm asking that we meet because we have ideas we need to put together. We need to take these streets back because every single day we're hearing about another shooting. I stopped count after 20 in the St. Thomas-St. John district and 20 in the St. Croix district. And I'm talking about homicides; it is sickening.

"And yes, I'm a bit perturbed, I'm a bit upset, because I have been vocal and I have been calling on the administration asking repeatedly for a meeting. Some may say, 'they're going to meet and nothing is going to happen,' but I want to be able to share some ideas," Mr. Gittens went on.

We can't be acting, as a government, like it's just another day in paradise; because paradise seems to have long past us.

The legislator, who served more than 20 years in the VIPD, said more could be happening that would discourage criminal activity. He said he felt "sorry" for the law enforcement officers who currently make up the police force, and revealed that some of them have been asking for guidance.

Mr. Gittens suggested that the 33 new officers who graduated on St. Croix on Monday -- [including his daughter](#) -- should all be assigned to the police department for the next 4-6 months.

"I say mobilize all local law enforcement officers under the direction of the police commissioner, specifically assigned to each district's police chief, and ensure that these police chiefs come up with a strategy plan and put all these officers on schedule so that we could see mass uniformed police presence in our streets," Mr. Gittens said.

"We need to see more traffic stops being done. You wouldn't believe what a mere traffic stop may deter. You will never know until the end of the week and you realize, wow, we didn't have one shooting this week. And that's the point you realize it's because of all the traffic stops that we're doing.

I'm truly sick of it each and every day.

"These thugs can move from east to west with these high-powered rifles in their possession because nobody is stopping them. And if we make it hot out there on the street, and they feel that there's a chance of being caught with these illegal firearms in their possession, then guess what: they'll stay in their corner."

Mr. Gittens then called on the governor to declare a state of emergency, a step that sources with intimate knowledge of the governor's plans to attend to the surge in crime here, said he intends take. These sources, who requested anonymity because they were not authorized to speak, said the governor is moving former police chief Winsburt McFarlane, who now heads the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs' enforcement arm, back to the VIPD to bolster the effort.

"We can't be acting as a government like it's just another day in paradise; because paradise seems to have long past us," Mr. Gittens said, adding, "I say it's time to declare a state of emergency [directed] at these criminals; and let's do what we need to do."

The senator then implored his colleagues to challenge the Mapp administration to do something about the escalating crime.

"I'm truly sick of it each and every day," he concluded.