

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. Croix Avis Says Mapp Blocked Would-Be Christmas Party At King's Alley Hotel As Retaliation

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ST. CROIX -- It was supposed to be The St. Croix Avis' way of ending the year in style, as it had done for the past 7 years: a party at the government-owned King's Alley Hotel in downtown Christiansted, held traditionally on the same day as the annual Boat Parade, as a way, amongst other reasons, of treating its employees for a year of hard work.

The party usually boasts the who's who in society, including senators, commissioners and other people of importance. Even former Governor John P. de Jongh was a regular attendee, and the event's location gave a bird's eye view of boat parade activities.

But the party did not happen this year; and The Avis said it's all because of Governor Kenneth Mapp's vindictive nature, as he moved to not only block the paper's annual affair at the location -- even after The Avis had booked the space long in advance -- but held his own party on the same day and in the same rooms the paper had rented.

Rena Brodhurst, publisher at The Avis, said her lawsuit against the governor seeking damages for loss of funds expended at the party and other economic damages, goes beyond the get-together. It intends to put a stop to Mr. Mapp's alleged attempts to disrupt the paper, who the suit alleges has stopped all government ads, and ended The Avis' daily delivery to the Office of the Governor and the Golden Grove Correctional Facility.

"My lawsuit is not about Gov. Kenneth Mapp kicking us out of the King's Alley Hotel and destroying The Avis' boat parade party. This is about me seeking the court's help to protect The Avis from future abuses of power," said Ms. Brodhurst in a statement issued to the press on Tuesday. "It is clear to me that if the USVI governor can use his powers to ruin our Christmas party, then throw his own party at the same place and time -- what other wickedness does he have planned for The Avis?"

The suit describes in detail what had occurred. It says a party organizer extended an invitation to the governor which he received on December 4. On December 6, the territory's leader rejected the invitation and "immediately set out to cause to have the rental agreement of The Avis with King's Alley Hotel improperly cancelled and to plan his own party in the space."

The suit alleges that the governor then set out to assign others to put together a party "in the same rooms and on the same date and time" that the newspaper's party would have been held.

Ms. Brodhurst alleges that Mr. Mapp's actions constitute tortious interference with a contract which, according to the suit, is illegal in the territory. And the interference, the suit continues, is a result of The Avis' "truthful reporting" of the governor's actions; including the most recent investigative reporting that laid bare Mr. Mapp's credit card spending, where it was revealed that he expended \$5,000 on towels and bed linens.

"Defendant has a history of vindictiveness and retaliating against those who expose his improper actions to include using his position with the government to retaliate against such persons in their dealings with various governmental entities," reads the suit.

Ms. Brodhurst said she's hoping to bring an end to the chief executive's acrimonious actions, and asked that the territory's residents lift the paper up in prayer.

"Will he instruct Licensing (DLCA) not to renew The Avis' business license? Will he tell the IRB director to harass The Avis over made up tax issues? Will he have me pulled over and arrested just because he runs the Police Department? These are unsettling times living here in our beloved St. Croix. The Avis staff and management ask all God respecting people to keep us in your prayers. Thank you," Ms. Brodhurst concluded.