

The Virgin Islands Consortium

DOJ Drops Charges Against Former Governor De Jongh After \$380,000 Settlement

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Ernice Gilbert **January 22, 2016**

1First Bank
DRAWN ON
FIRSTBANK, PUERTO RICO
PURCHASER'S COPY **MANAGER'S CHECK**

Check No. 019352
10/7/2015
Date: 01/14/2016

Purchaser: JOHN P DE JONGH JR
Payee: GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

NON-NEGOTIABLE

Branch: 719
Teller: 09645
Source:

Amount: \$380,000.00
Fee: \$15.00
Total: \$380,015.00

THIS MULTI-TONE AREA OF THE DOCUMENT CHANGES COLOR GRADUALLY AND EVENLY FROM DARK TO LIGHT WITH DARKER AREAS BOTH TOP AND BOTTOM

1First Bank
Manager's Check
Check No. 019352
10/7/2015
Date: 01/14/2016

Purchaser: JOHN P DE JONGH JR

Pay ***Three Hundred Eighty Thousand Dollars***

To The
Order of: GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

\$380,000.00

Valid for Six Months After Issue Date
Branch Teller No. 09645

FDIC DRAWN ON FIRSTBANK
SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO
YNS-0001-00118

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ST. THOMAS -- [Charges levied](#) against former Governor John P. de Jongh in regards to repairs made to his Estate Mafolie home using some \$500,000 of public funds, have been dropped, [court documents](#) provided to The Consortium confirm.

The charges were dropped with prejudice; which means they were dismissed permanently, and Governor de Jongh issued a statement following the ruling, thanking residents who elected him twice to the highest office of the land.

"I would like to thank our community for the heartfelt support that has been expressed to me and my family during this period, as it has shown the best of what we have to offer to

each other," said the former governor.

But the settlement came at a high cost for Mr. de Jongh, as he had to pay the Government of the Virgin Islands some \$380,000 to settle the dispute, which is over \$170,000 more than he initially agreed to reimburse. After the Mapp administration [rejected the first offer](#), Mr. de Jongh, along with Julito Francis, former director of the Virgin Islands Public Finance Authority, were arrested.

"With the inclusion of the added amount for the unwanted guardhouse, the payment of \$380,000 was agreed to in order to facilitate the final resolution of this matter without further legal proceedings," reads the statement Mr. de Jongh issued on Friday afternoon.

The former chief executive took office in 2007, but instead of living at the governor's mansion in Estate Catherineberg, he chose to reside at his private residence — where Public Works spent over \$490,000 erecting a fence, building a guard house and installing a camera system. The project was given the green light after Public Works sought and received an opinion from the V.I. Attorney General's office, stating it was permissible to move ahead with the work once public interest was served and was the main reason for the expense.

But in 2010, the U.S. Interior Department inspector general's office concluded in a report that the renovations of Mr. de Jongh's private home with public funds, "usurped the Legislature's authority to determine how to spend public funds," and should be returned.

In his public statement issued in August, 2015, however, the governor recalled his version of the events that lead to him moving into his private home while serving as governor of the Virgin Islands.

"I was advised that to renovate Estate Catharineberg for a family would require well over a year of construction at an estimated cost in excess of \$1.5 million... I also was informed that the estimated annual housing expenses to be incurred at Catharineberg would be \$80,000 per year, which over the course of my eight year tenure as your governor would have cost upwards of \$640,000.

"Simply put, the costs associated with moving my family into Catharineberg would have meant an expenditure in excess of \$2.1 million of taxpayer money. I did not consider the cost for such major renovations to the property, or the additional annual costs associated to be appropriate. And so I decided to remain at my personal residence," said the former governor.

He added: "As I approached the end of my second term as governor, the Department of Property and Procurement completed the established process for obtaining appraisals or valuations for public purposes. The amount reimbursed was based on the averaging of the appraised values presented by three independent, licensed appraisers commissioned by the Department of Property and Procurement. The value of the security measures was determined to be \$222,631.60, and I accepted the valuation."

Mr. De jongh also noted the dilemma faced by every governor as it relates to housing, and said if the issue was not addressed through the political process, the reoccurring problem will perpetuate.

“This will also confront future governors unless a solution is attained through the political process, how and where the community decides it wishes to house and protect our Governor is a matter of public policy,” Mr. de Jongh said. “Whether to house the Governor at a government-owned residence or have the decision made on a case-by-case basis following each election, the decision should not be a matter of partisan politics for anyone elected to serve as governor. I trust that the community will soon determine a housing policy for the future.”

Indeed, Governor Kenneth Mapp has faced his own housing difficulties, and was [forced to vacate](#) the Estate Nazareth mansion that he resided in for several months, costing the GVI over \$100,000. And Mr. Mapp has been criticized for [living in expensive hotels](#) after declaring the territory to be [on the brink of financial collapse](#) in early 2015, while delivering his first State of the Territory Address.

Even so, the territory's leader told The Consortium recently that [those were trivial matters](#), and recounted the gains the territory has seen under his reign. Mr. Mapp said big announcements were to come at his second State of the Territory Address, set for Monday, January 25.