

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Announces Official Launch Of 'Centennial Caucus', Led By Top Congresspeople

VIC News / **Published On February 26, 2016 10:30 PM /**

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ST. CROIX -- The formation of a Virgin Islands-focused Centennial caucus, which a press release the Mapp administration issued on Thursday described as Governor Kenneth Mapp's vision for Congress to play a more active and meaningful role in the territory's upcoming 100th anniversary commemoration, was announced to the full U.S. Senate in a letter distributed this week.

U.S. Senate President pro tempore Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) are the co-chairpersons of the newly formed Virgin Islands Centennial Caucus, according to the release.

Governor Mapp met with senators Hatch and Gillibrand on Wednesday in Senator's Hatch's Capitol Hill office to discuss plans going forward. They were joined by Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and Virgin Islands Delegate Stacey Plaskett.

Last year, Mr. Mapp [presented the idea to Majority Leader McConnell](#).

The territory's leader was received in Senator Hatch's historic ceremonial suite, which has been the office of the Senate President pro tempore for over two centuries. In his remarks, Majority Leader McConnell stated that the importance of the Virgin Islands Centennial would not be overlooked in the Senate because of the commitment of the two Senators who have been chosen to lead the effort.

Senate President pro tempore Orrin Hatch, is third in the line of succession to the Presidency, and is the Chairman of the powerful Senate Finance Committee, with broad jurisdiction over American tax and trade policies. The Finance Committee's far-reaching jurisdiction includes rules governing the Virgin Islands Economic Development tax incentive program, the rum tax cover-over, tax extenders, customs duties and collection



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Governor Mapp and U.S. Senate

President Orrin Hatch met Wednesday on Capitol Hill.

Senator Kirsten Gillibrand was appointed by former Governor Patterson of New York to fill the unexpired term of Senator Hillary Clinton following her appointment to become U.S. Secretary of State. Two years ago, Mrs. Gillibrand was reelected to the Senate with the highest vote percentage in the history of New York. As a U.S. Senator, she has garnered the respect of her colleagues and the media because of her willingness to take on the toughest battles on behalf of the underdogs in American society.

Her advocacy and leadership on the Senate Armed Services Committee has shed light on the issue of sexual harassment and assaults in the U.S. military. Her anti-harassment legislation, while unpopular with military traditionalists, is considered to be an essential element to the modernization of the U.S.'s armed forces.

During their remarks, the senators stressed the importance of fairness in the creation of the Virgin Islands Centennial Caucus. Mr. Hatch emphasized his belief that "all Americans, including Virgin Islanders deserved fair and equal treatment". He also

expressed his appreciation to the territory for giving Founding Father Alexander Hamilton, a product of 18th Century St. Croix.

Mrs. Gillibrand congratulated the U.S. Virgin Islands for winning the “support of Majority Leader McConnell and Senator Hatch, the Senate’s two most powerful Senators”.

Mrs. Gillibrand, who has family members that reside in the territory, noted that some of the challenges facing the territory were difficult, and committed to pursuing solutions to issues created by lack of representation.

Senators Hatch and Gillibrand described the purpose of the Caucus in a letter to colleagues earlier this week.

“This caucus will serve as an informal, bipartisan forum to educate Congress on the role the territory has played in our nation’s history, to work with others—both in and out of government—to consider the best ways to observe this important anniversary, and to begin a conversation about what can be done to improve the lives of the people living in the U.S. Virgin Islands,” the senators wrote.

The Hatch-Gillibrand letter refers to the Centennial as “an excellent opportunity to highlight the U.S. Virgin Islands and to appropriately acknowledge its place in the American landscape. In addition, it is a suitable occasion to begin bipartisan discussions about ways Washington can make changes or remove roadblocks in order to provide improved incentives for growth and investment in the Virgin Islands and greater prosperity for the people who live there.”

Mr. Mapp thanked the Senators for their active leadership and for championing the territory with the creation of the Virgin Islands Centennial Caucus. The governor also thanked “the citizens who have supported the Virgin Islands Congressional Outreach Program since 2005 because of its role in fostering support for the V.I. with leaders such as McConnell, Hatch and Gillibrand.”

Mr. Mapp assured those present Wednesday that the Virgin Islands Centennial Caucus would have his full personal support as well as that of the entire Virgin Islands Government. The announcement of the U.S. Virgin Islands’ Caucus was a highlight of Mr. Mapp’s week-long visit to the nation’s capital for the National Governors Association Winter Meeting and numerous meetings with federal officials and members of Congress.

Feature Image: From left to right: Governor Kenneth Mapp, U.S. Senate President pro tempore Orrin Hatch and Virgin Islands Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett.

Image Credit: Government House.