

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Gittens Responds To Critics: Tourism Goes Down The Drain If Officials Don't Attend Seatrade

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Ernice Gilbert **March 24, 2016**



It ain't who you know; it's who knows you. - Senator Kenneth Gittens.

ST. CROIX -- Senator Kenneth Gittens, above, has responded to critics who say it is not necessary for almost all the territory's senators and their support staff to travel to Florida every year for [Seatrade Global](#), a 30-year annual cruise line exhibition that connects buyers and suppliers for a week of networking, sourcing, innovation and education.

For Mr. Gittens, the survival of the territory's tourism product, currently its top revenue generator, would falter if territory officials don't attend.

"The naysayers could say what they want about officials traveling to Seatrade, but they must be there to see and understand what is taking place so that the Virgin Islands could stay on top of its game, Mr. Gittens said during a Committee on Rules and Judiciary hearing held at the Fritz E. Lawaetz Legislative Hall on Tuesday. "If we are absent from there, I could also see this number one industry that we're talking about, going right down the drain."

But residents have not been frustrated with local officials in the tourism sector traveling to the important event; they have become incensed with the number of senators who make the trip to Florida -- nine in total this year -- when Department of Tourism officials, including Commissioner Beverly Nicholson-Doty, as well as Governor Kenneth Mapp, and the West Indian Company's President and CEO, Joseph Boschulte, are present every year.

Mr. Gittens said after learning that St. Croix [would not receive a single cruise ship during the summer months](#) of 2016, he asked cruise line executives to consider the island if other port of calls were to cancel. Their response, he said, was favorable. "The cruise line officials that were there were all in agreement that St. Croix would be considered," he said, a development Mr. Gittens contends would not be possible had he not asked the executives to consider the option.

"When those cruise line executives responded to me, and revealed some of the things that they would do in the future to ensure that we were going to get more calls in the territory, I was relieved, though still disappointed that we dropped the ball sometime back."

He added: "It ain't who you know; it's who knows you. I learned that in Washington, D.C."

Senators Neville James, Kenneth Gittens, Almando Liburd, Positive Nelson, Novelle Francis, Kurt Vialet, Myron Jackson, Clifford Graham and Jean Forde traveled to Seatrade this year, some of them with support staff. Department of Tourism officials were also present, as well as WICO representatives and Governor Kenneth Mapp.

In all, well over two dozen representatives from the U.S. Virgin Islands attended Seatrade on taxpayers' dollars; and residents commenting on The Consortium's Facebook platform were not kind in their reactions.

"While I think it was necessary for Mapp and Beverly to be there, these idiotic senators can explain the need for 9 of them to be there. Like Positive stated, we don't need that many senators for the territory so why the heck are we paying for 9 of them to go to the event? The clown show continues," [said](#) Cathalina John-Baptiste. "Every single one of them should be ashamed."

"Joke of the day: How many senators does it take to explain tourism and the importance of cruise ships into the VI harbors?," asked Rel GE.

"There is absolutely NO reason for 9 senators to be at this conference. None! I don't care what excuse they have. We need to teach them a lesson," Wilfred A. Schouten Sr. said.

Only two senators have issued press releases detailing their experience at Seatrade; Mr. Gittens and Novelle Francis. In their releases, nothing new was divulged, only that the territory [needs to act quickly](#) in enhancing its tourism product, and that Cuba is not an

immediate threat to territory -- observations that should be gleaned by the Department of Tourism.

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