

The Virgin Islands Consortium

No Limousines For Mapp And Potter As Emergency Vehicles Bill Passes Full Senate

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ST. THOMAS -- The full Senate acted on a myriad of bills at the Earl B. Ottley Legislative Hall on Wednesday, among them a measure shrouded in controversy because of language that would allow the executive branch to purchase "ceremonial vehicles".

But bill No. 31-0224 was amended to include language specifically stating that the funds made available through the measure -- which essentially gives the Mapp administration and Public Finance Authority a \$10 million line of credit to buy vehicles for first responder and law enforcement agencies -- could not be used to purchase ceremonial vehicles. The Mapp administration [had requested](#) that \$350,000 be set aside to purchase the limousines.

Amendment No. 31-944, offered by Senator Janette Millin Young, adds a section that says, "Nothing in this Act is intended to authorize the purchase of official or ceremonial vehicles for the offices of the Governor and Lieutenant Governor. The commissioner of the Department of Property and Procurement is prohibited from using the monies authorized in this Act to purchase ceremonial or official vehicles for the offices of the Governor and Lieutenant Governor."

Senators had come under fire after a Consortium news piece [revealed](#) that an amendment sponsored by Senator Kurt Violet left an open-ended nature to the measure, leaving the discretion of purchasing those vehicles to Government House. But residents disagreed, and ardently [voiced](#) their [opinions](#). Mr. Violet, along with Mrs. Millin Young, said that now was not the right time to spend upwards \$300,000 on ceremonial vehicles.

And Mrs. Millin Young, who [had been assailed](#) and called a "Setty Fowl" and jackass by Governor Kenneth Mapp over comments she made in reference to monies the government owes to her mother, returned the favor by suggesting that Mr. Mapp, instead of requesting hundreds of thousands of dollars to buy ceremonial vehicles, should buy a Fiat; similar to the one that Pope Francis [rode in](#) while in the U.S. last year.

"As I offer this amendment I have one word: Fiat," Mrs. Millin Young fired. "I want the people of the Virgin Islands to know that this is no disrespect to the high offices of governor and lieutenant governor, but this territory has a lot of pressing needs, and we think its inordinate to spend \$300,000 on two cars.

"We have fifteen members of this Legislature and there's a big myth out there that we are assigned cars and we are not. At least for the last two Legislatures we have not been assigned cars; we drive our own vehicles. So when you tell me that there is a need for these ceremonial vehicles, maybe there is a want, but not a need," she said.

Mr. Violet, who offered the amended that caused the uproar, concurred with Mrs. Millin Young, stressing that now is just not the time to make such purchases.

"The time is just not right," Mr. Violet began. "We're hearing a tremendous outcry from the people of the Virgin Islands in reference to ceremonial vehicles, and the time isn't right. The time might be right at a future date, but right now, with the fiscal issues that we have, the time isn't right."

He added: "We're sending the wrong message on why we're purchasing ceremonial vehicles. It's not a disrespect to the Office of the Governor, but at this time the current fleet that they're utilizing, in terms of the SUVs that they have, need to be continued to be utilized. The time isn't right."

And Senate President Neville James, who had communicated to the governor that the Senate would not allocate \$350,000 for the limousines in [August 2015](#), reiterated his stance on Wednesday, and rebuked Mr. Mapp for putting the responsibility on the Legislature to allocate funds for the requested purchases.

"The governor can buy whatever vehicle he wants at whatever cost. What we're saying here is why include the Legislature as it relates to specificity," Mr. James said.

The bill, with the ceremonial vehicles allocation now out, includes funding for road-paving equipment to be utilized by the Department of Public Works, and for 50 additional employees at said department to maintain the territory's roads, which will be bolstered by federal funding. The \$10 million will also include funds for new video surveillance equipment at the Bureau of Corrections, as well as new equipment for the Virgin Islands Fire Service. And Mr. Violet added an amendment yesterday that makes provision for the Youth Rehabilitation Center to receive new vehicles as well.

The measure was supported by senators Violet, Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly, James, Marvin Blyden, Almando "Rocky" Liburd, Clifford Graham, Myron Jackson, Sammuel Sanes, Kenneth Gittens, Novelle Francis and Jean Forde. Senators who opposed the measure were Justin Harrigan, Sr., Positive Nelson, Millin Young and Tregenza Roach.