

The Virgin Islands Consortium

One Voice, Group Representing Local Churches, Decries Gambling And Its 'Empty Promises' Of Economic Growth

Business / **Published On April 03, 2016 12:51 PM /**

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ST. THOMAS -- One Voice, a Christian-based religious group based here that describes itself as a grass roots organization whose purpose is to galvanize both the faith-based community, and others in the U.S. Virgin Islands in unity to promote integrity in government and Godly family values, has issued a statement condemning gambling.

The statement, issued late March in reference to a measure sponsored by Senator Almando Liburd pushing for regulated gambling in the St. Thomas-St. John district, was forwarded to The Consortium on the behalf of One Voice leaders following the Senate's

override of a Governor Kenneth Mapp veto that sought to stall progress on a gaming facility set to open at Caravelle Hotel, until the hotel could fulfill requirements mandated by law.

"In view of the recent increase in criminal homicides, the high rate of unemployment among our young people, and the recent exposé on gambling addiction by some of our former public officials, the attempt to special order this legislation without public hearing is an affront to the principle of democratic participation by its citizens," reads the statement, written by One Voice President Apostle Alger B. Warren.

"We are acutely aware of the presence of gaming in the territory, the negative impact of it in our community, and the empty promises of those who promote it. We have previously voiced our opposition to this matter and here and now raise our opposition once again. One Voice stands in solidarity with the St. Thomas/St. John Christian Council of Churches, St. Thomas/St. John Fellowship of Ministers, and other members of the community, as we have remained steadfast in total opposition to casino gaming," the statement concluded.

On Wednesday, the full Senate voted to [override the governor's veto](#), clearing the path for Caravelle Hotel to open the gaming facility in downtown Christiansted. One of the casino's most ardent supporters, Senator Kenneth Gittens, said the gambling facility would create new jobs and attract more businesses to the downtown area of Christiansted.

"I was relieved when I received the news that VIGL Operations, LLC had received a unanimous vote on their application that was considered by the commission following a public hearing Thursday and additional testimony earlier today. Sitting in on some of the testimony and taking a walk through the property, it was clear to me that the potential of this project has a far-reaching effect and provides for a new beginning for our economy as it rebounds," Mr. Gittens said.

According to second-term Democrat, the public interest was there to see the project move forward as dozens of residents crammed into the commission hearing room in support. He said he was impressed that the company had also started a tourism campaign promoting the island of St. Croix by having their mainland customers enter into a raffle to win a 3-day trip with \$500 of spending cash.

"This type of national publicity ahead of the license even being granted can only do great things for St. Croix. We have been in a tough economic atmosphere for some time now and luring visitors to the island to enjoy our amenities and eventually our two casinos will give the needed cash infusion to set us on a more stable fiscal foundation," Senator Gittens added.

The plans for development, according to Mr. Gittens, gave strong support for economic growth and fiscal stimulation for the downtown Christiansted area that will ultimately spread across the island.

"I did a walkthrough of some of the downtown property, spoke with neighboring business owners, met hotel staff and watched the progress of the local subcontractors. I feel really good about this project that will bring jobs, hotel rooms, entertainment, gaming and long sought-after activity to the historic town, Mr. Gittens concluded.

