

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Gas Station Owners Act Unscrupulous In The Name Of Profit; Devin Carrington Says

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ST. CROIX -- Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs Commissioner Devin Carrington on Wednesday told lawmakers that his department's only recourse in fighting the high prices of gas and other consumer goods in the territory, was to first conduct an investigation -- [with help from the Department of Justice](#) -- and then act upon the results of the investigation, which may lead the department to profit margins on gas and other consumer goods.

"With the price of oil falling on the world market and being reflected at the pumps in the U.S.A., we are very concerned that this trend is not being followed in the Virgin Islands," Mr. Carrington said while giving testimony during a Committee on Government Affairs,

Consumers and Veterans Affairs at the Earl B. Ottley Legislative Hall. The commissioner added that D.L.C.A. continues to issue press releases to encourage gas stations to lower their prices, but the "the responses by gas stations have not been encouraging," he said.

Mr. Carrington added that just as business owners want the government to be friendly, so too must businesses act ethically in how they treats consumers. He said some hide behind the veil of LLCs and give little thought to the plight of consumers in a struggling economy, and warned that the results of the investigation "could possibly implicate criminal as well as consumer issues if price and market manipulation through collusion is found."

"I have concluded that availing ourselves of statutory powers to enact price controls is the surest way consumers of this territory can be relieved of the burden of high-priced consumer commodities," Mr. Carrington said. "The fiction of corporate personhood provides that corporations be treated as virtual persons under the law, and because the actual persons behind the corporations are granted limited liability respecting their personal assets, some individuals use the protection of limited liability to act unscrupulously or even illegally in their business dealings with consumers in the name of profit," he said. "We must insist that these businesses act in a consumer sensitive/friendly manner, just as it insisted that the government be business-friendly."

The possible implementation of laws that allow the government to implement profit margins on commodity goods is a topic of discussion because of "the selfish and excessive behavior" of consumer goods businesses, Mr. Carrington said. However, cognizant of the intricacies that involves implementing price control laws, Mr. Carrington said D.L.C.A. would not take such action without concrete evidence of manipulation, noting that the government was challenged in the past. Nonetheless, "if price controls are warranted as a result of the study, they shall be implemented."