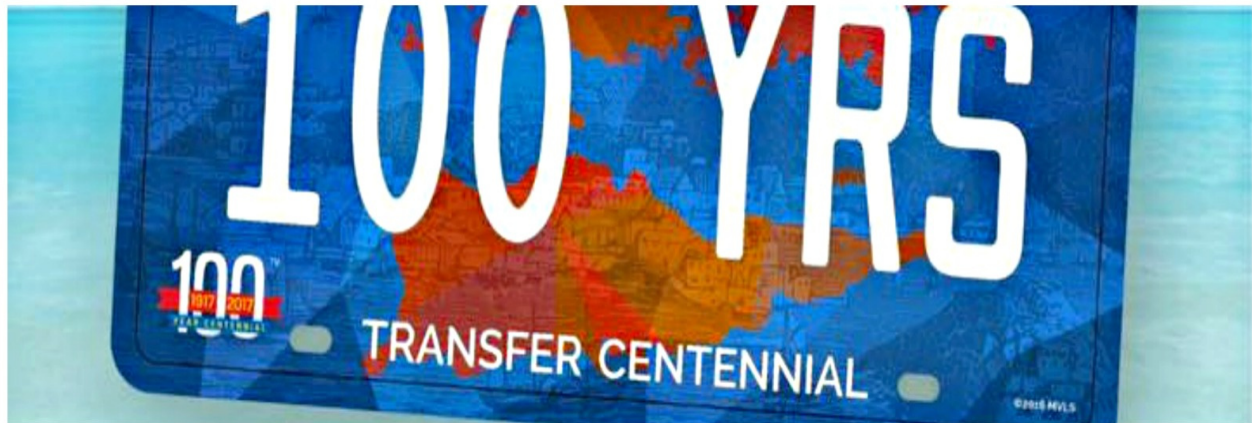


The Virgin Islands Consortium

Sen. Jackson To Offer Amendment Repealing \$10 Centennial License Plate Tax Amid Backlash

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ST. THOMAS -- Senator Myron Jackson, the author of an amendment to the Centennial Commission bill that added \$10 to the flat cost of \$39 for the controversial Centennial license plate, said today during a Committee on Government Services, Consumer and Veterans Affairs hearing that he would offer an amendment that would completely eliminate the extra \$10 from the bill -- \$5 of which have been allocated to fund the 2017 Centennial activities and another \$5 set aside for the Bureau of Motor Vehicles. Instead, Mr. Jackson said the bill would use funds from the \$39 that B.M.V. already charge its customers.

Mr. Jackson said he never intended to add an extra financial burden on residents; and in hindsight, he would have structured the measure differently.

"I passed the amendment, and in hindsight I would say the legislation could have been crafted differently," Mr. Jackson said. "It should have taken the money from the established fees and not to put the \$10 surcharge or a tax on the existing fees. We are told that no legislation is perfect and I have to agree. And in this case, in hindsight my intent was not to tax the people of the Virgin Islands anymore than they're already taxed in reference to this."

He added: "But given the existing law, and given the fact that the Centennial Commission has jurisdiction, rightfully some portion of that funding should assist us in these most difficult times. So at the appropriate time I will ask for an amendment to strike the \$10 tax fee, and we will find funding as the governor sends down his budget in 2017."

In a telephone conversation with The Consortium on Thursday evening, Mr. Jackson said discussions are ongoing in regards to how those who've already paid the \$49, and those who will pay in the coming months will be compensated if the amended passes. A suggestion, he said, is to offer rebates during the next vehicle registration cycle.

The license plate controversy arose after B.M.V. issued a notice that vexed many Virgin Islanders. It read: "MANDATORY: Effective Monday, April 11, 2016, all vehicle plates will be changing to the New Transfer Centennial plates. The price of the Centennial plates will be \$49. You must turn in your old plates to window #2."

The word "centennial" is used in relation to a hundredth year anniversary. March 31, 2017, marks the 100th year anniversary of the Virgin Islands transfer from Denmark to the United States, hence the formation of the Centennial Commission, which was created in 2010 by the 29th Legislature to oversee and plan activities for the milestone, according to Mr. Jackson.

Word of the notice had been circulating social media, along with comments decrying the move as too restrictive. And although many residents had reposted the notice, it went viral when St. Croix resident Annamaria Heyliger-Hector [posted a picture](#) along with her assessment of the matter.

Mr. Jackson said B.M.V. created the firestorm because it did not clearly explain in what context the word "mandatory" was being used. He said residents don't have to spend \$49 on a license plate if their vehicles are not up for registration. However, when the time comes to renew your vehicle's registration, the plates will be replaced with the Centennial design, which has been the case with every new design.

"If you've already registered your car, when you go in next year, you will be issued a new plate that just happens to be the Centennial design," Mr. Jackson said. Residents may also choose plates representing 19 different organizations like the Landmark Society and Veterans. B.M.V. Director Lawrence Olive called those designs "vanity plates."