

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Jay Williams, Assistant U.S. Commerce Secretary, Says Obama Administration Committed To Aiding U.S.V.I.

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ST. THOMAS -- Representatives from the U.S. Department of Commerce including Assistant Secretary Jay Williams, above center, have spent two days in the territory meeting with Governor Kenneth Mapp, doing site tours, and meeting with local and federal government officials, according to a Government House press release.

Activities at Government House here culminated with a roundtable discussion led by Director of Bureau of Economic Research Bernadette Melendez, Mr. Williams and Alma Plummer, Economic Development Administration representative for the U.S.V.I.,

according to Government House.

As the administrator of the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (E.D.A.), Mr. Williams is charged with leading the federal economic development agenda by promoting innovation and competitiveness, and preparing American regions for growth and success in the global economy.

Prior to joining the U.S.D.O.C., Mr. Williams served as the executive director of the Office of Recovery for Auto Communities and Workers, working directly with state and local stakeholders in areas affected by the changing American automotive industry to deliver federal support to ensure they returned to better economic condition. He also served in the White House as deputy director for the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs where he led efforts to engage mayors, city council members and county officials around the country, according to the release. A native of Youngstown, Ohio, Mr. Williams served as its mayor from 2006 to 2011. He holds a B.S.B.A. in finance from Youngstown State University.

During the round table discussion, Mr. Williams identified with his experience as the mayor of Youngstown. He encouraged the commissioners and business leaders who were present to seek opportunities that may exist in the territory to leverage community involvement and develop any underperforming labor talent.

Virgin Islands Commissioner of Labor, Catherine Hendry, discussed the need for technical training to begin early in territory's schools and for secondary training tailored to meet the needs of companies investing in the territory to ensure that graduates are employable.

"We need to work in a cooperative fashion with education, labor and the private sector to develop a workforce that is ready to meet the needs of employers. We need to work together," Ms. Hendry said. Mr. Williams agreed that proper labor training was the cornerstone to successful relationship-building with the private employers, and encouraged inter-agency cooperation.

According to the release, in an earlier meeting that day, Mr. Mapp outlined the needs of the territory, reminding Mr. Williams that the Virgin Islands faces unique challenges due to its porous borders that leave it susceptible to the influences of drug and human trafficking, and the influx of illegal border crossings. The governor also shared his goals for continuing to identify federal funds to help manage the challenges and to develop and complete capital projects on all three islands to bolster the economy.

Mr. Williams indicated that although the Obama administration was in its last phase, the president remains committed to assisting the Virgin Islands with available funds.

Alma Plummer, who serves as the U.S.D.O.C.'s representative and point of contact for the U.S. Virgin Islands, discussed options for a small [cruise port in the Gallows Bay](#) area and the effects that extending the boardwalk in Christiansted would have on the economy. The team also visited the south shore of the island to inspect projects that were implemented or at various stages of completion.