

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Requests An Increase Of \$25 Million In Capital Projects Budget To Address Zika, Hospital Repairs

Business / **Published On September 09, 2016 10:58 AM /**

Staff **September 09, 2016**



ST. THOMAS -- Governor Kenneth Mapp forwarded to Senate President Neville James an amendment to the proposed 2016 capital projects budget bill, requesting additional funding to solve what Government House says are two critical areas targeted at improving the health and well-being of all Virgin Islanders: the Zika virus and the territory's hospitals.

The governor is requesting an additional \$5 million for the purchase, shipping and installation of a tire shredder system under the Department of Public Works and an additional \$10 million to fund vital structural repairs to the territory's hospitals. The governor also requested an additional \$5 million in working capital for both hospitals --

bringing the total request to \$25 million.

But the request comes at a time when the territory's credit rating has been downgraded by [two major](#) U.S. ratings firms, causing interest rates on bonds to increase. And Mr. James, [in an interview with The Consortium in August](#), said the governor's capital projects budget of \$260 million would most likely be shaved to about \$160 million because of the downgrades.

According to the release, as a part of the efforts to fight Zika in the territory, the departments of Health, Planning and Natural Resources, and the Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority, have each taken action to limit the spread of this virus. Having identified used tires as a problem source for standing water collection, the governor on June 16 submitted a formal request to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) asking for \$10 million to purchase two tire shredder systems. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the EPA have both advised that funding for these systems are tied to Congress's approval of the President Barack Obama's request of \$1.8 billion to mitigate and protect American citizens against Zika. But Congress has yet to act on the funding measure.

According to Government House, there are more than 300,000 tires stockpiled and it is estimated that another half a million more are lying in tire shops, on private properties and in remote areas across the territory. These tires are a tremendous breeding ground for mosquitos. And while the Department of Health sprays the tires in the stockpile, many more remain a catchment for water, according to Government House.

To avoid the imposition of penalties under the consent decree covering landfills in the territory, the V.I. District Court is asking the U.S. Virgin Islands to spend \$1.5 million to remove approximately 300,000 tires. Mr. Mapp reasoned, "Removing some tires and leaving the others do not solve our problem."

Authorizing the \$5 million to acquire a system to permanently eliminate tires from all sectors of the territory would create a solution for tire disposal that would allow for the recycling of the pelletized rubber into asphalt mix that is used to pave and repair roadways, according to the release.

Mr. Mapp, who the release says met with the governing board of J.F.L., said a good portion of the working capital monies are expected to be used to reduce the hospital's payables to the VI Water & Power Authority. The capital funds are expected to be used for much needed roof repairs, mitigation of mold, HVAC improvements and grey water and sewage infrastructure repairs, according to the release.