

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Governor Mapp Renominates Current V.I. Supreme Court Justices

VIC News / **Published On November 02, 2016 08:12 PM /**

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ST. CROIX -- At a press conference held in St. Thomas on Wednesday, Governor Kenneth Mapp announced that he was renominating the current three V.I. Supreme Court Justices to serve new terms, the duration of which lasts 10 years per justice.

All the justices -- who were unanimously supported by the Senate on October 27, 2006 and became vested on Dec. 28, 2006,-- terms expired on October 27, 2016.

The governor renominated Justices Maria M. Cabret, Rhys S. Hodge (chief justice) and Ive A. Swan, lauding their work as exceptional and thanking them for a combined over 100 years of service.

"I am honored to have this responsibility to renominate these three justices, who I sincerely believe have served the people of the Virgin Islands well; have done the work of the Supreme Court tremendous justice that the court is looked upon with tremendous respect and admiration by the people of the Virgin Islands," Mr. Mapp said.

"I really believe, as I've expressed to each of you, that you have done and worked beyond the call of duty. You make all of us in the Virgin Islands proud and have earned the right to be renominated and to continue to serve the Virgin Islands in your roles and capacities as justices in the Supreme Court," he added.

Virgin Islands law, for seven days, bars the governor from sending his candidates to the Senate following the announcement of nominations. However, the 31st Legislature has forwarded a measure to the governor, part of which he says he intends to sign, that would extend the terms of the V.I. Supreme Court justices for 180 days, giving both branches of government ample time to ratify the justices.

The three justices are people of faith, with all notably thanking God for the current positions that they are in. And they thanked family as well, with Justices Hodge and Swan thanking their wives for being patient with them, and Justice Cabret, who is not married, thanking her family for their unwavering support. They also thanked Mr. Mapp for his confidence in their ability.

And they made it a point to thank former Governor Charles Turnbull, as they were nominated by him. At least two of the justices also noted their role models, with Justice Cabret mentioning three Virgin Islands women that she'd looked up to over the years, including the late Eulalie Rivera, Ann Abramson who is still alive, and celebrated educator and storyteller, the late Delta Dorsh.

"It has been an immense pleasure and privilege to serve the people that I love so much," Justice Cabret said. "But I think the people of the Virgin Islands know that they're first in my heart, and they will always be first in my heart. I keep them in mind when I am serving." Her sentiments were echoed by justices Hodge and Swan, who themselves noted service to the people as a key part of their dedication.

Chief Justice Hodge applauded the governor for his intent to nominate two other justices to complete the Supreme Court, stating that it would add fresh perspective and ideas, and "to further increase the efficiency and permit it to speak with greater finality." And he lauded the governor's leadership relative to court unification.

Background

On January 29, 2007, the Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands officially assumed appellate jurisdiction over all appeals in the Virgin Islands. This action culminated decades of the territory's attempt to have a fully independent and functional third branch of government, according to Mr. Mapp. On that day the Virgin Islands joined the other fifty states and territories of the U.S. in obtaining an autonomous judicial structure.

On June 19, 2012, after a review of finished cases, the Third Circuit recommended that appeals from the Virgin Islands Supreme Court go to the U.S. Supreme Court instead of the Third Circuit. In July 2012, former Delegate to Congress Donna M. Christensen introduced a bill to shorten the time from 15 years after the 2007 advent of the Supreme

Court for this to take effect, and the bill passed the House of Representatives in November, and the Senate in December 2012. President Barack Obama signed the bill into law on December 29, 2012, and all appeals from Supreme Court decisions from that day forward go to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Feature Image: From left to right: Justices Ive A. Swan, Maria M. Cabret and Rhys S. Hodge. (Credit: Government House)

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