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Senators Hold Positive Nelson's Nomination To Medicinal Marijuana Board

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Senators who make up the Committee on Rules and Judiciary on Thursday held in committee the nomination of Positive Nelson to serve on the Virgin Islands Cannabis Advisory Board. Mr. Nelson, a former senator, was the chief reason medicinal marijuana became legal in the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the measure was approved during his tenure as a lawmaker. This presented a problem for his nomination to the board, according to lawmakers, who cited Virgin Islands Code that forbids past senators from serving on a board of any office that was established during their tenure.

Separately, senators raised concerns about the federal implications of transporting marijuana inter-island. "The inter-island transportation of medicinal cannabis in federal zones can lead to legal problems for our residents," said Senator Janelle Sarauw, chair of the committee.

Senator Kenneth Gittens added, “It is important that law-abiding Virgin Islanders do not end up on the wrong side of the law who are employed in the medicinal cannabis industry.”

Mr. Nelson told his former colleagues that only authorized commercial vessels with legal documentation can transport medicinal cannabis. However, the law remains that it is illegal for a private vessel to transport marijuana into U.S. waters -- including U.S. territories.

Mr. Nelson's was one of two Medicinal Cannabis Advisory Board nominees voted on Thursday. The other nominee, V.I. Department of Health Assistant Commissioner Nicole Craigwell-Syms, was voted on favorably by lawmakers.

Separately, senators approved the nominations of Loretta Lloyd, Vincent Georges, and Myrna George to serve as members on the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission. The nominees collectively expressed tackling present challenges such as the unloading of passengers in the middle of traffic, the competition of gypsy cabs, and joining the overpopulated taxicab lines at the airport.

Senator Novelle Francis addressed an issue he said runs counterproductive to the territory's tourism product, especially since taxicab drivers are sometimes the first experience visitors have on the island. The issue related to the displaying of flags of other nations on taxicabs -- oftentimes nations of the taxicab drivers' birth.

“Taxicab drivers are ambassadors of the Virgin Islands, yet some of them continue to fly flags of other nations on their vehicles. It's counterproductive to the tourism product," Mr. Francis said. "Policies and procedures must be in place for proper representation of the territory.”

The lawmakers also approved the following measures:

- Bill No. 33-0116 – An Act amending Title 32 of the Virgin Islands Code as it relates to the Virgin Islands Horse Racing Commission.
- Bill No. 33-0033 – An Act to add a new section to title 3, chapter 16 of the Virgin Islands Code, to reenact the Virgin Islands Tax Study Commission which will be tasked with reviewing the current laws and tax structure of the Virgin Islands for initiating tax reform and maximizing revenue fairly and impartially.
- Bill No. 33-0122 – An Act amending Title 7, chapter 1, subchapter 1, section 2 of the Virgin Islands code by expanding the definition of farming and by adding current industry standard terminology.
- Bill No. 33-0123 – An Act to earmark a percentage of the Government of the Virgin Islands budget to support local agriculture.
- Bill No. 33-0068 – An Act to amend title 20, part II, chapter 32, subchapter I of the Virgin Islands Code by adding a new section to create a process for transferring a vehicle upon the death of an individual, without going through the probate process.

However, the following were held in committee:

- Bill No. 33-0100 – An Act amending title 20, part II, chapter 39, section 436(b)(1) of the Virgin Islands Code by including persons who are disabled within the class of persons exempt from being charged a fee for a disabled window decal.
- Bill No. 33-0151 – An Act amending title 15, part II, chapter 11, section 167 of the Virgin Islands Code by increasing the threshold for summary administration of estates in the Virgin Islands.

Senators present were Janelle Sarauw, Kenneth Gittens, Javan James, Donna Frett-Gregory, Novelle Francis, Kurt Violet, and Myron Jackson.

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