

The Virgin Islands Consortium

In Last 31st Legislature Session, Action To Be Taken On Multiple Bills

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ST. THOMAS -- The 31st Legislature will gather today for its last session as 2016 comes to a close, and as it makes way for the new body, the 32nd Legislature, which is to convene on January 9.

At today's session, set to begin at 10:00 a.m., senators will either approve or reject more than 20 measures, with the approved measures being forwarded to Governor Kenneth Mapp for his final decision.

Among the bills are two aimed at addressing environmental issues through the management of waste, and recycling. The Senate previously approved a plastic bag ban

measure, which the governor [signed into law](#). All three measures were introduced by Mr. Mapp.

Another major piece of legislation to be decided upon today, is the “Virgin Islands Revenue Enhancement and Economic Recovery Act of 2017”, a measure [forwarded to the body by the governor](#), which Mr. Mapp says is structured “to address the financial challenges facing the government and ultimately, the territory.”

The governor says the Act has been designed to identify opportunities to close the gap in the government's continuing structural deficits (\$110 million this year), to curtail continuous borrowing to meet the operating expenditures of the territory, and to enhance the government's ability to pay income tax refunds to Virgin Islanders on a timely basis. The measure is projected to generate \$300 million in five years.

The funds will come through new taxation of specific non-essential commodities and areas of the economy that can contribute more without increasing the cost of living to V.I. residents, according to the governor, referring to alcohol and tobacco products, as well as new taxes on timeshare unit owners. Items such as food, medicine, clothing and the essential components of raising a family or operating a business in the territory will not be affected by this proposed legislation, according to Government House.

Measures to [regulate the territory's banking and insurance industry](#); a bill [relocating \\$1 million to the Juan F. Luis Hospital and Medical Center](#) for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services [standard of participation improvements](#); a measure removing the requirement that says members of the territory's hospital boards must not be employed as nurses or doctors at the facilities; a bill that aims to [eliminate custom duties](#); another authorizing some of the funds collected from the former HOVENSA homes, which the government now owns and is leasing to Limetree Bay Terminals, [go towards](#) decreasing the Government Employees' Retirement System's unfunded liability, along with other measures will be acted upon today.

See full list of items [here](#).

Feature Image: The Earl B. Ottley Legislature in St. Thomas. (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, VIC)