

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## St. Croix Democrats Reject Mapp's Five-Year Plan, Fail To Introduce Alternative

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ST. CROIX -- St. Croix Senate Democrats late Friday responded to Governor Kenneth Mapp following a press conference the territory's leader held on the urgent need to pass a revenue-generating measure that would bolster the confidence of the bond market in the territory's bonds, as the market has refused to borrow the USVI money, citing uneasiness in the V.I. Government's ability to make good on its covenants, as well as the islands' annual need to float bonds to satisfy its structural deficit.

Mr. Mapp, noting the urgency of the matter, said refusal to pass the measure or failure to replace it with something comparable would mean "the curtailing of hours, it would mean furloughing employees, it would mean cutting services, in some areas completely

to a halt — it would mean closing offices of the Government of the Virgin Islands in some areas. It would be a drastic impact to the operations of the Government of the Virgin Islands."

Late Friday, however, St. Croix Senate Democrats, among them Novelle Francis, Sammuell Sanes and Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly, criticized the governor's plan, stating that instead of introducing the new taxes, Mr. Mapp should focus on cost-saving and revenue-generating efforts (the five-year plan is a revenue generating measure, albeit through taxation) that do not solely focus on additional taxes to residents and visitors.

Mr. Francis said he would like Mr. Mapp to find more "fiscally responsible" measures to avert the impending financial crisis. He also chastised the Mapp administration for so far not following through on projects such as the repairing of the territory's roads (GARVEE Bonds), and the Paul E. Joseph Stadium project, (the latter being halted by Mr. Mapp after having started just before former governor John P. de Jongh left office), after two years of promises.

"Looking at the big picture, the government's financial position would be in much better standing if long-planned capital projects had begun as promised by Mapp and members of his administration. They have continuously told us that they are ready and we have facilitated the execution of these plans with funding and then nothing has happened," Mr. Francis said.

"The legislature will continue to do its part to offer alternatives and to ensure that a reasonable, viable and equitable economic recovery plan is implemented," said Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly.

And Mr. Sanes said increased taxation is not what this territory needs. "To increase taxes on the backs of the people of this territory will not improve the financial well-being of our economy. Additionally, it is essential that input is included from the private sector due to the fact that the economic plight we are facing affects everyone in the Virgin Islands," he said. "There are several projects that have been funded by the Legislature that can and will stimulate economic development, let's get these projects moving, let's put people to work."

But the senators did not introduce any new ideas, nor did they hint at what direction they would take to steer the Virgin Islands from the pending financial collapse. On Friday, Mr. Mapp said it's also the Senate's job to find ways to grow the economy through legislation. Yet, the Democrats -- or the Independents for that matter -- have not introduced legislation that would address the immediate need.