

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp, Potter, Show Off Fleet Of Brand New Suburbans At Agrifest 2017

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ST. CROIX -- The Government of the Virgin Islands had already spent over \$200,000 to purchase two new Chevrolet Suburbans for Governor Kenneth Mapp late last year, which a Property and Procurement invoice said were retrofitted with armored components as recommended by security detail. The Suburbans were aside from [Mr. Mapp's \\$88,000 ceremonial Cadillac XTS](#) purchased a month earlier, and now, the government has added new Suburbans to the fleet for Lieutenant Governor Osbert Potter -- potentially spending in total over \$400,000 for new vehicles even as the territory's financial condition continues to deteriorate.

The vehicles in the St. Croix district lined the back of the west tent at the Agricultural Fair Grounds on Saturday during the annual event's opening ceremony. At least three residents expressed anger upon seeing vehicles, complaining that the governor has not led the territory by example.

"What the hell is this?!" complained one resident. "And they're asking [Dept. of Health] employees to consider working two weeks without pay to make up for the 10 percent reduction in operations?" The resident was referring to a recent announcement from Government House that directed all government department and agencies to [cut their operations by 10 percent](#).

Six days ago, Department of Finance Commissioner Valdamier Collens, who is also the executive director of the Public Finance Authority, said the government only had [two days cash on hand left](#); it is not known how much money the government has on hand currently.

Cherie Munchez, Mr. Mapp's communications director, told The Consortium on Saturday that Virgin Islanders have to move past the vehicles, adding that the governor's office called for a certain level of protection and the old fleet -- which she said was 15 years old -- had done its time.



New GVI fleet to transport governor and lieutenant governor when on St. Croix parked behind west tent at Agricultural Fair grounds on Saturday, February 18, 2017. (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, VIC)

"What we have to remember -- and we keep talking about these vehicles over and over again -- the vehicle that the governor replaced was from the Turnbull administration, so that car was 15 years old when they replaced it," Ms. Munchez said, referring to the ceremonial Cadillac, not the Suburbans. She said one vehicle in the old fleet had been repaired twice, and that it had broken down during Mr. Mapp's inauguration.

"At some point our governor is entitled to safe transportation that keeps him unexposed to the dangers of a vehicle breaking down on the road," Ms. Munchez said. "And the fact of the matter is that if we're going to move our territory into a modern, productive society, there are certain requirements that we all have to sustain, and certainly our governor has to be kept safe, and there's a protocol for that."

Even so, residents complain that Mr. Mapp leadership has not been helpful because he has yet to cutback on his own spending habits in light of the territory's financial crisis. The governor recently said on radio that high pay of public officials [was of no concern to him](#); he continues to reside in St. Thomas's [most expensive resort when in Charlotte Amalie](#), and appears to care little about Virgin Islanders' constant cry that, as governor, he should lead by example and cut his salary.

Earlier this month, a St. Croix resident challenged Mr. Mapp on talk radio to consider lowering his salary. But Mr. Mapp, sounding irritated, told the caller that his salary — \$150,000 annually — or that of the lieutenant governor and lawmakers for that matter, were the least of his worries.

[Governor Mapp Says High Salaries Of Local Officials Not His Priority](#)

While the resident — who called in to the Mario Moorhead talk show on WDHP 1620 A.M. — was still expressing herself, Mr. Mapp interrupted her to make his point.

"Alright, so let's put it in numbers," Mr. Mapp began. "So pay the governor \$50,000, right? So you just saved \$100,000 on my salary. Pay the lieutenant governor \$50,000, you save \$75,000, right? So now you're at \$125,000. And cut each senator [by] \$30,000, so you multiple that times 50 — you don't have a half a million dollars," Mr. Mapp said. "You could do that and say, 'fine, now we have done something, and now they're getting paid what we think they earn.' What I'm trying to suggest to you is that rather than go through the political hoops to say we're doing something like that, it seems to be symbolic.

"What we're saying to you and the community, is we need to grow, expand our economy — we need to get the opportunities. We have workers that aren't getting the pay they require for their profession, so they're taking opportunities and leaving and going to other jurisdictions... The constant cry of cut, cut, cut and you're going to solve the problem is not a real solution," Mr. Mapp said.

The resident responded by comparing the salaries of some U.S. governors to that of the territory's. She reminded Mr. Mapp that with just over 100,000 residents in the USVI, he was presiding over a fraction of the people compared to his U.S. mainland counterparts.

"If we're going to compare like you're comparing salaries, governors in the United States, most of them, make under \$100,000 a year," the caller said. Indeed, many mainland governors receive much less than their USVI counterpart.

The governor of Maine, for example, makes \$70,000 annually. Maine's population is 1.33 million, according to 2014 estimates. That's almost ten times as many people as the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Colorado's governor earns an annual salary of \$90,000. The state has a population of 5.356 million people according to 2014 estimates. In fact, Mr. Mapp's salary matches that of the governor of Texas at \$150,000 annually; Texas being the second-largest state by population in the U.S., with a total of 26,448,193 people.

"Why do we have to be so exorbitant [given] our condition?" asked the caller. Mr. Mapp responded by stating, "I came and met it that way." The caller then pressed the governor, stating that if he would lower his salary, "it would be more than symbolic, it would be inspiring."

Mr. Mapp interrupted again and said, "If you guys want to cut the salary, go cut the salary. That's not my discussion. I'm just being candid with you." The governor then explained the expense of getting professionals to work for the government, and pointed to the Department of Health Commissioner, Michelle Davis, who will serve in the territory for two years according to the agreement. Ms. Davis's local salary is \$150,000 annually.

"You could keep singing that song, I'm only suggesting if that's what the community wants to do, it wants to get it done, [then] get it done and that's fine. It's not going to solve any problem," Mr. Mapp said. The caller then challenged the governor to take it upon himself to lower his salary. "It would be very impressive if you did," she said. But the governor fired back, "The community can do it."

He added. "I'm going to be honest and tell you I'm not taking up that initiative. I am more concerned about the better growth, the wider growth of the community, the opportunity for jobs, for investing in the community to get the revenues up to provide the services. But the symbolic cut of cutting two or three hundred thousand dollars out of a \$700 million budget to say, 'okay, we're paying the senators lower, and we're paying the governor and lieutenant governor lower,' and so we've created some massive achievement, for me is not realistic, and I'm just not going to expend my time on it."