

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp And At Least Four Senators Head To Seatrade In Florida

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ST. THOMAS -- Governor Kenneth Mapp left the territory on Sunday for Fort Lauderdale, Florida for the three-day annual Seatrade Cruise Global Conference, while at least four senators -- Dwayne DeGraff, Neville James, Alicia Hansen and Myron Jackson -- will make the trip.

Held every year in March, Seatrade is the world's largest gathering of who's who in the cruise industry. It brings together cruise line executives, media, speakers, port representatives, ship builders and vendors to discuss most aspects of cruising.

[Nine senators attended Seatrade last year](#), a move that was viewed as overkill by many residents, some contending that the trip was essentially a boondoggle for the lawmakers. But with the territory's financial crisis acutely affecting most parts of the V.I. government, and with residents' ire already trained on senators following [the passage of the sin tax and property tax measures](#), many chose not to attend this year's affair.

The governor left on Sunday and will return on Tuesday, according to Government House. A release from the office of Senate President Myron Jackson did not state clearly when he would leave, but it noted that Mr. Jackson would be at the event until Thursday, which is when Seatrade ends. As for the three other senators traveling to Florida, whose names were revealed to The Consortium by Mr. Jackson in an interview on Friday, the Senate president said details about their travel plans should be sought from their respective offices.

Mr. Jackson said that at the top of his agenda is a meeting with West Indian Company Ltd. President and CEO Joseph Boschulte and other industry experts, aimed at reinvigorating discussion of the expansion of the WICO dock in Charlotte Amalie to accommodate an increase in cruise ship traffic to St. Thomas.

"I will be meeting with investors and trying to get the industry interested in WICO," Mr. Jackson said.

Pointing to the importance of Seatrade, Mr. Jackson said attending the event was of paramount importance to his office. He said he needed to know what the cruise industry is looking for relative to the territory as a destination, and new trends affecting the market. "Four years ago they were talking about Cuba; Cuba is now a reality," he said. "Three years ago I didn't even know that there was anything called the Spanish Virgin Islands, but now Vieques and Culebra are calling themselves the Spanish Virgin Islands to compete with the Virgin Islands market. So we could sit back and talk about tourism and not be engaged in the industry, and my position has been that the WICO dock needs to be built and expanded -- that has been my position from the very beginning."

Stating that St. Thomas has always been a mercantile market, Mr. Jackson said leaders needed to have a fresh look at the sea and how it could be maximized for commerce. He mentioned sea highways and an increase in inter-island travel options, which he said would reduce cost of travel as well as the cost of shipping goods between the islands.

Mr. Jackson said that if the WICO dock expansion is revisited, it would also allow for the creation of a festival park. The dredged land from the dock extension would provide the acreage for the park, Mr. Jackson contends, which he said would be a destination venue for tourists as well as locals in providing an appropriate location for cultural heritage and arts entertainment.

The senator reminded that the government benefits from passenger taxes, landing fees, wharf fees, tonnage fees, and water use fees which translates into millions of dollars flowing into the economy annually.

"We cannot afford to let this opportunity pass us by, as we allow other ports to take away our cruise ship visitors," Mr. Jackson said. "Expanding our dock will help the territory generate the crucial revenue the government needs in order to meet its obligations and

be sustainable.”

According to a blurb on the event's website, Seatrade Cruise Global has continued to present an unmatched educational program with forward-thinking, actionable insight for more than 30 years. The 2017 Conference will be more innovative, interactive and thought provoking than ever, with inspiring keynotes and panel discussions that will dive deep into industry trends and issues, according to organizers.

[Here's a look](#) at all Seatrade 2017 events. Topics to be discussed this year include:

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