

The Virgin Islands Consortium

The Rising Cost Of Food And Gas Takes Center Stage At Senate Hearing

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Donna Bellot **March 22, 2017**



ST. THOMAS -- Rising food and gas prices, the establishment of processing plants on both St. Thomas and St. Croix, and other issues affecting consumerism in the territory were discussed, during the first meeting of the Committee on Workforce Development, Consumer Affairs and Culture—held at the Earl Ottley Legislative Chambers on St. Thomas on Tuesday.

During the meeting, Senate President Myron D. Jackson addressed the expressed concerns of residents about irregular pricing at major grocery stores and gas stations in the territory.

“We believe from our investigations and likewise the calls of our constituents that there is an issue,” said Mr. Jackson. Businesses have in response cited that their prices are a result of outrageous shipping and electricity costs they must endure. Mr. Jackson noted that unlike a century ago, most of the food coming into the Virgin Islands is imported.

Mr. Jackson then pointed to legislation in the form of Bill No. 31-0091/Act No. 7747 to establish processing plants on both St. Thomas-St. John and St Croix districts -- a bill that he sponsored.

“[The] bill is intended to empower local farmers and small business owners of the recently passed Bill No. 32-0081, meant to streamline the business license process to a period of 30 days for applicants who meet the requirements as a way of encouraging more businesses to open in the Virgin Islands and increase revenue in the territory,” said Mr. Jackson.

Committee members also heard testimony from Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs Commissioner Devin Carrington, regarding the effects that shipping food may have on quality standards. He says the department is tasked with carrying out inspections on all business entities to ensure consumers are being provided the best level of service and quality of goods.

“[This] includes regular checking to see that businesses are adhering to sell by dates, pricing, packaging, and freshness of perishable commodities,” Mr. Carrington said.

When addressing the issues of the irregular pricing of goods, Mr. Carrington stated it is considered an extreme measure—normally subjected to challenges by the court and rarely practiced by states and territories—to implement price control. He said a study of food and gas prices in the territory began in October and is still underway. The study is being conducted by the D.L.C.A. in conjunction with the Department of Justice.

At the close of the agenda, the Virgin Islands Carnival Committee gave testimony addressing issues of implementing an entrance fee for the traditionally free Carnival Village, as well as providing an update on the observance of the Transfer Centennial. [Earlier this month](#), Halvor Hart, executive director of the St. Thomas Carnival Committee, revealed to The Consortium that a fee of \$5 will be charged to enter the Carnival Village this year, with children 13 and under coming in free. There will also be two nights of free admission, Mr. Hart said.