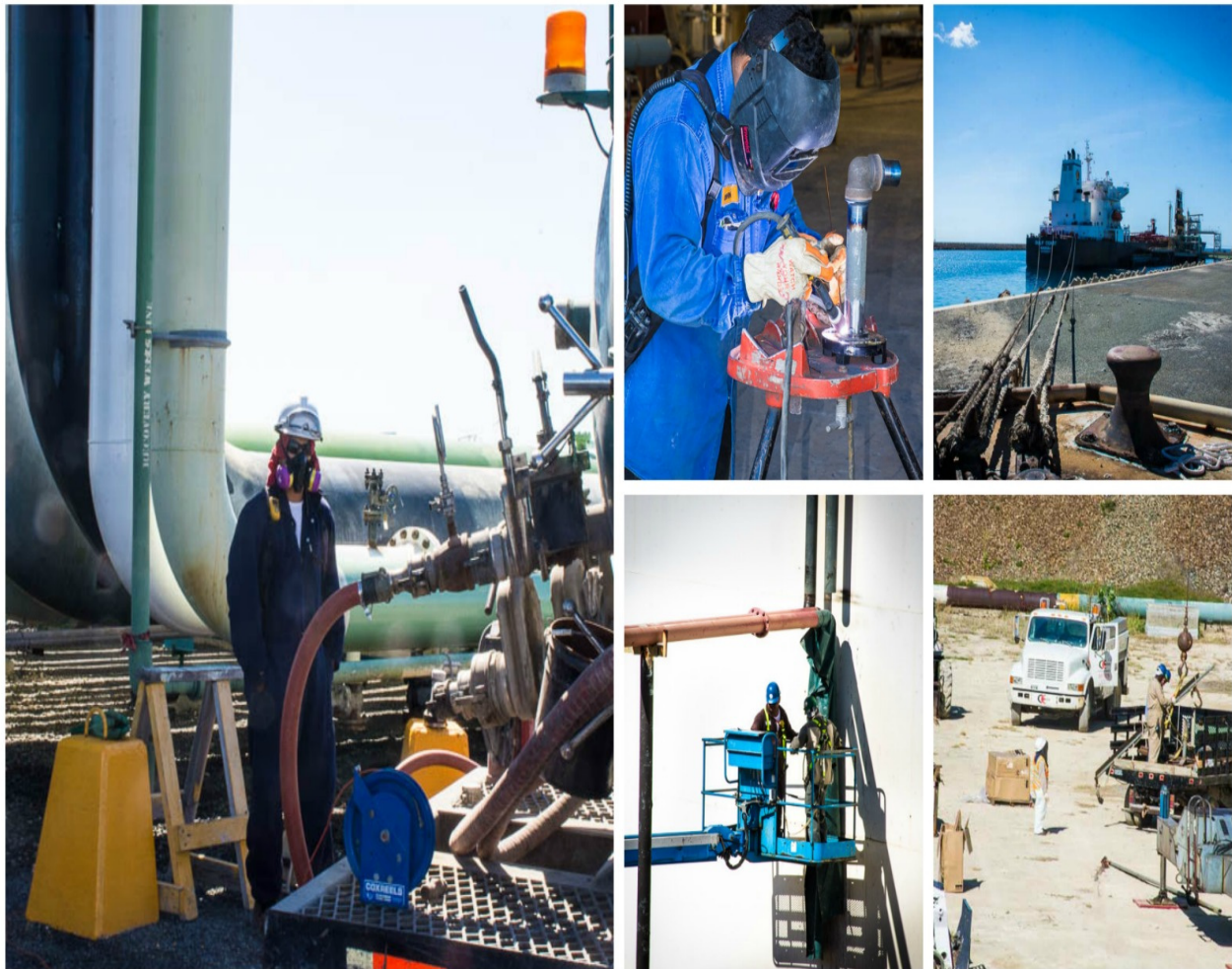


The Virgin Islands Consortium

Limetree Bay Contractors Are Hiring Locals, Mapp Says, Disputing Claim By Sen. Rivera-O'Reilly

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ST. CROIX -- Governor Kenneth Mapp on Thursday disputed a claim by Senator Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly that Limetree Bay contractors were importing people from Puerto Rico instead of hiring from the local pool of workers.

"There's nothing that could be further from the truth," Mr. Mapp said during the Chamber of Commerce's Breakfast with the Governor meeting held at the Palms At Pelican Cove.

The governor said Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly called him less than a year ago with the concern, and he immediately moved into action by speaking with Department of Labor Commissioner Catherine Hendry, and Darius Sweet, Limetree Bay CEO, and was able to

establish with Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly that more than 86 percent of the employees at Limetree Bay had lived in the territory for a year more, which Mr. Mapp said is pursuant to the contract terms.

The governor said St. Croix residents know well of turnaround days at the former HOVENSA refinery, as well as other major island projects, when persons from Puerto Rico would be imported to help with the season of overabundant work, as they would be seen all around the island -- roaming the towns, eating at restaurants and drinking at bars.

"And I dare say it, I'm not a hermit, I'm out in the community and I don't see the import of that traffic that could support any claims that the jobs at Limetree Bay are going to off-islanders and not to the people of the Virgin Islands and particularly those on St. Croix," Mr. Mapp said.

During a hearing held by the Committee of Workforce Development, Consumer Affairs and Culture at the Earl B. Ottley Legislative Hall on Tuesday, Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly [said that](#) Limetree Bay contractors, instead of hiring locals, were shipping in employees from neighboring Puerto Rico.

"Several weeks ago I met with individuals of Limetree Bay, and one of the reasons I asked for the meeting was because I wanted them to learn about the programs under the Department of Labor, in particular the Workforce, Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014, because all of us get calls all of the time from people who say they're not being considered for jobs at the storage terminal, but we're all keenly aware that people are being brought from Puerto Rico to fill these jobs," said Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly. She said the contractors said they were not aware of the programs included in the Act — including several training, "and the ability that exists were they to become partners and providers, to train the disengaged, out-of-school youth and to ultimately get them a job," the senator added.

Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly said she left the meeting with an understanding that Limetree Bay would gather all of its contractors into a meeting, along with a D.O.L. representative who would explain the programs that exist. She added that between four to five contractors were asked to fund the training of five young men with the intent of ultimately hiring them, which she said would result in 20 to 25 additional jobs for locals.

The territory has yet to fully recover from the closure of HOVENSA in 2012, which left about 2,000 people unemployed, caused a ripple effect through the economy and forced thousands to migrate to the U.S. mainland in search for opportunities. Today, the territory's unemployment rate stands at 10.5 percent, D.O.L. Commissioner Catherine Hendry revealed. The national average is currently 4.9 percent.

Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly then levied a pointed criticism to Ms. Hendry, bluntly telling the commissioner that her department, relative to the needs of the unemployed, has been out of touch.

"As you read your testimony, it is clear — and please forgive me if I offend you — it is clear that your department does not really get the level of hopelessness that exists within those individuals that are unemployed," she said.

The senator added that while testimonies given by D.O.L. officials may sound good on paper — and to people with four-year degrees — “those people who have given up... they don’t understand any of this,” Mrs. Rivera-O’Reilly contended, holding up what appeared to be testimonial documents. “All they know is that they are unemployed and they want a job; that they go to these businesses and they asked for an application, and they are told there are no job openings — yet they see people being hired.

“All they know is that they show up at the Department of Labor, they ask for help and paper is pushed, and they are told to come back tomorrow, or they are given a number of documents to complete, and they give up.”

“I don’t know how we are going to address that,” Mrs. Rivera-O’Reilly continued, stating that the unemployed referred to in her statement are people she meet and talk to, and people who call senators’ offices.

Pointing her aim back to Limetree Bay and D.O.L.’s failure to inform contractors of programs available to aid in the employment of locals, Mrs. Rivera-O’Reilly said, “How is it that the place that is supposed to be creating the most jobs within the next 24 months isn’t aware of all of the great programs that exist? Why is it that [Pinnacle](#) is still not a provider? Why is it that the young men even that are in some of your programs have lacked the very basic skills to perform in those programs, and to be placed ultimately in a job?”

The senator said she would followup with the meeting with the hope of getting positive results now that the contractors’ actions have been brought to the fore.