

The Virgin Islands Consortium

In Rebuke To Mapp, Senators Send All Special Session Bills To Committee

Government / **Published On May 11, 2017 11:02 AM /**

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ST. THOMAS -- A special Senate session called by Governor Kenneth Mapp that included eight bills for consideration, caused revulsion from both majority and minority caucus lawmakers, with virtually all legislators contending that [the bills](#) -- among them a measure to appropriate \$3 million to the Juan F. Luis Hospital for emergency sewage and drainage repairs -- included a myriad of errors, were rushed and therefore not ready.

"Governor Mapp has sent a very strong message to the Legislature with this special session. He said 'ah yuh ain't doing ah yuh wuk," said Senator Janette Millin Young, speaking briefly in local dialect. "What an offense." She said she wrote the governor requesting that they meet, even if they don't get along. However, Mr. Mapp appeared to

have suggested to the senator that there was no contention between them." Mrs. Millin Young had apparently requested some information in part relative to the measures that were before the body on Wednesday. "But we still did not get the information. The information we requested didn't come," she said.

"And here we are in a Committee of the Whole, thinking and telling the public that the committee process is not important," Mrs. Millin said, suggesting that Mr. Mapp expected the measures to be ratified without going to the various committees.

"So are we to say that we should not meet in committee? That everything should just be rammed through? Bypass the whole process? Mrs. Millin Young asked rhetorically. She then mentioned Alexander Farrelly, a former governor of the U.S. Virgin Islands, calling him one of her favorite leaders. She said Mr. Farrelly had the opposite problem with the Legislature during his time: He thought they were rushing the legislative process. "He said 'hurry dog eat raw meat,' and I don't want that on our menu today" Mrs. Millin said.

The senators had multiple gripes with the bills. Senate President Myron Jackson told The Consortium following the special session that many of measures had errors, and there was simply not enough time to vet the bills. And even as the senators acknowledged the urgency of the sewage and drainage problems brewing at the Juan F. Luis Hospital, the measure that Mr. Mapp sent seeking \$3 million to address the problem, and another \$1.5 million for the Roy Lester Schneider Hospital, were rushed, lawmakers contended.

A bill about the Tourism Advertising Revolving Fund came without a bill number, for example, only stating that it was proposed by the governor. And that same bill included conflicting funding amounts in its body and summary. "I have never seen a special session with so many items," Senator Positive Nelson said. "This is boldly disrespecting this body. Six agenda items -- it's apparent that most of these aren't ready," he added, stating that a number of changes were made to some of the measures up until the last minute.

At one point the meeting turned disorderly, with Majority Leader Neville James interrupting Mr. Nelson's time. Mr. Jackson attempted to reestablish decorum, but the back and forth continued, with Mr. James telling Mr. Nelson to meet him at the back, apparently for a bout. Mr. Nelson responded, "I'm a 5th degree black belt, I'll mash you in. You ain't serious." A 2-minute recess was called to calm the situation. Later, Mr. James suggested that the argument was not serious, as he and Mr. Nelson's relationship goes past politics.

And Mr. James had some pointed words regarding Wednesday's session. "The bills that are before the Legislature, during this meeting of the Committee of the Whole, they're on full flight to committee," Mr. James said. He said the Finance Committee, chaired by Senator Kurt Vialet, would meet on May 18 to vet some of the measures (some are to be vetted in the Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture), agreeing with senators by stating that the bills came with a litany of errors. Even so, Mr. James said the majority was in support of many of the measures, including the anti illegal doping measure, and without question the bill to aid the hospitals.

"I had informed the governor prior to [the session], asking him to retract the call for session," Mr. Jackson said, adding that he'd told the governor that the body was set to meet soon. "What ended up being six bills submitted ended up being eight. We had to

bifurcate one of the bills into two. The fact is anything that may have passed would have been the emergency measures for Schneider [Regional Medical Center] and [Juan F. Luis Hospital]. But the bills became problematic because of some errors. In some areas they were deficient, and we did our best to get them ready -- we just did not have sufficient time to do what was necessary. But the best thing for us to do was to send them to committee."

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