

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Majority Caucus Says Its Confident In Its Leadership Following Special Session

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ST. CROIX -- The 32nd Legislature's Majority Caucus doubled down on its platform on Thursday regarding legislation sent down by Governor Kenneth Mapp, which were considered during Wednesday's special session.

After testimony was heard in Committee of the Whole and the body was raised back into session, all bills were sent to their appropriate committees for further vetting by a majority vote.

Senate Majority Leader Neville James, above, said the governor's bills were ill-prepared, and included many technical errors. Furthermore, the urgency placed on passing the

legislation undermined the due process required to consider any measures brought before the Senate, according to the release.

"It is unprecedented for the governor of the Virgin Islands to send down seven measures to the Legislature with no time to vet any of the relevant documents, without ample time to conduct discussion with stakeholders and citizens who the measures would affect, and with significant pressure from cabinet members and government funded commercials being circulated online," Mr. James stated. "This institution is capable and prepared to consider meaningful legislation without the executive branch's influence and/or interference."

Mr. James's rebuff of the governor and confidence in the Majority Caucus's ability comes even as the Democrats have yet to introduce emergency measures aimed at addressing the issues Mr. Mapp identified through the various bills. Among the emergencies are the drainage and sewage issues plaguing the Juan F. Luis Hospital, which is requesting some \$3 million to implement a complete change of the pipes causing the problems.

According to the release, despite disputes carried out on the floor, Mr. James said that the Majority Caucus would not be deterred by the consistent disruptive behavior initiated by the Minority Caucus, and notwithstanding said rancor, the actions of the body showed a willingness to embrace bipartisanship.

It was not clear which incident Mr. James was referring to, or whether he was alluding to the Minority Caucus's alleged tilt on being disruptive. It was Mr. James who interrupted Senator Positive Nelson, leader of the minority, during his time on Wednesday, leading to a verbal back and forth that included talk of taking the argument to the back for an apparent bout. "I'm a 5th-degree black belt, I'll mash you in. You ain't serious," said Mr. Nelson following Mr. James's challenge.

Nonetheless, Mr. James said the Senate's unified decision on Wednesday sent a clear message to the governor.

"It was a decision of the body, not just the Majority or Minority Caucus—an agreement between all sitting senators—to send a message to the administration that the Senate will not rush the people's business," he said. "Taxpayer money is on the line and when bills are being sent down that confusingly instruct us to defund the G.E.R.S. to satisfy appropriations, we are left with no choice but to convene a committee to investigate the consequences that such a measure would render. While the minority was adamant in their consistent desire to engage in futile exercises of rancor, I'm happy that bipartisanship prevailed."

According to the release, Mr. James could not understate that the best interest of the people of the territory is to allow each branch of government to perform its responsibilities separately and equally, and as the first branch of government, the Senate's duty is to give legislation before them proper and thorough consideration.

"Our commitment to better all walks of life here in the territory has not wavered in any way, shape or form," Mr. James said. "The people want us to be productive on their behalf, and that is what we intend to do."