

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Says Bills With Errors Considered At Special Session Derived From Senate, Not Government House

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ST. THOMAS -- Government House on Tuesday said that problems with legislation considered during [last week's special session](#) were largely due to errors made at the Senate, and not Government House.

In a [letter](#) sent Monday to Senate President Myron Jackson, Governor Kenneth Mapp responded to concerns raised on the Senate floor, and later reported in the media, that the bills sent to the Legislature could not be acted on as a result of errors and contradictions. Mr. Mapp expressed concern that the proposed bills prepared by Government House for the May 10 special session were not the same bills that were considered by the body.

The charge from the governor sends an already fragile process into a tailspin; members of the Committee on Finance, chaired by Senator Kurt Violet, will hear some of the measures in question on Thursday, where responses to Mr. Mapp's comments will most likely be placed on record.

According to the release, Government House Chief Legal Counsel Emile Henderson compared the bills that Mr. Mapp transmitted to the Legislature against the bills that were introduced on the Senate floor on May 10.

"To my chagrin, the proposed bills prepared by Government House and submitted to the 32nd Legislature of the Virgin Islands were not the bills before the Legislature," Mr. Mapp said. "What is even more troubling is that the bills the Legislature numbered, authored as 'Request of the Governor' and subsequently voted to send to committees were not the proposals I sent to you and each member of the Legislature."

Government House says the review by Mr. Henderson and his staff found that the bills introduced at the special session contained errors, technical and substantive, and some contained considerable contradictions to what was sent to the Legislature for consideration. Further review found that these errors and omissions occurred in the office of the Legislature's legal counsel, Government House charged.

Calls placed to Mr. Jackson were not returned at time of writing.

"The bills I submitted in my special call and the bills that were introduced and debated on the Senate floor were significantly different bills," Mr. Mapp wrote in a letter to Mr. Jackson. "The question now is: Are the bills which have been sent to the legislative committees legally there? These bills or proposals are not my bills. The bills voted on by the Senate on May 10, 2017 are substantively different than the proposals I transmitted to the Legislature."

Mr. Mapp encouraged Mr. Jackson to launch a review at the Senate, compare the drafts submitted by Government House to him and each Member of the Senate, to what was considered on the Senate floor and ultimately acted upon.

"Mr. President, this is a serious matter and this should not happen again. These errors substantially changed the content of or excluded language contained in my original proposals. The bills prepared by the Legislature's legal counsel's office now require extensive corrections before they can even be considered by the committees to which they were sent. Am I required to call another special session and submit my original submission of proposed bills for proper action by the Senate?" he asked.

The governor acknowledged his staff had made mistakes of their own, to include an incorrect bill summary, however, none of these controverted the intent of the legislation, according to Government House. He said Government House will review its protocols.

"I regret this error and I assure you that there was no 'trickery' involved in this oversight. The testimony of my financial team made clear the intent of the appropriation request and acknowledged the error," he wrote.

Mr. Mapp asked for recommendations from the Senate president on how to deal with the issue of the 32nd Legislature voting to transmit the special session bills to committees that were not the original legislation as submitted by the governor.

