

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bill Providing \$3 Million To Juan Luis Hospital For Sewage Problems Forwarded To Governor

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ST. THOMAS -- The Juan F. Luis Hospital will finally receive at least some of the funding it needs to begin repair work to its emergency department and other areas of the hospital that have been affected by the sewage and drainage problems, forcing the hospital to commence the process [of moving its E.R. to the Cardiac Center.](#)

The measure takes \$3 million from multiple sources to fund the hospital, but Minority Caucus lawmakers balked at those sources, which include the Women's Coalition of St. Croix and a senior citizens home in Frederiksted.

"You think I'm going to take away the money from the Women's Coalition with all the issues they have with the abuse of women?" Senator Alicia Hansen asked rhetorically. "And the senior citizens that need transportation and a place to go after they have served?" Mrs. Hansen said instead of taking funds from the aforementioned sources, the Legislature should disband the Centennial Commission. And she mentioned revenue-generating measures that the Minority Caucus have introduced, complaining that they have yet to be taken up by the Democrats, who control the Senate.

But Senator Kurt Vialet explained that the monies being reprogrammed from Women's Coalition and the other sources to fund the sewage problems at J.F.L., were monies that have been sitting unused.

"I got to put on the record that a lot of those monies are from bond proceeds that were floated back in 2009, 2010, and 2012" Mr. Vialet revealed. "We have millions of dollars that are sitting in accounts unspent, and we're paying debt service on those monies every single year."

He added that enough monies have been reserved from the Internal Revenue Matching Fund to replace funds to the affected entities on the basis of need and utmost importance.

"So if the senior citizens [home] is of utmost importance, then we will replace those monies there," Mr. Vialet said. "If the Women's Coalition is of utmost importance, then we will replace those monies." Mr. Vialet said the Women's Coalition funds, which is \$60,000, was for a building that \$60,000 cannot complete. The funds are for "capital projects so it can't be used for services," he reminded. The aforementioned senior citizens home has an appropriation of \$150,000 for repairs on the facility, but it needs over \$1 million to complete the project -- which has yet to begin.

"We cannot have monies just sitting there" while the government pays debt service, Mr. Vialet contended.

The Democrats wholeheartedly supported the measure, with Senator Novelle Francis reminding lawmakers of the deplorable conditions at the hospital as a result of the sewage and drainage issues.

"We got our citizens, already injured, being required to use latrines, out-house, in a civilized society on the island of St. Croix," Senator Novelle Francis acknowledged as he lamented the current condition at J.F.L. "I don't see how any senator from the district of St. Croix is going to deny fixing that situation that we're having there."

The Bill, [No. 32-0091](#), was sponsored by Senators Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly and Myron Jackson on the request of the governor. Aside from the mentioned sources that the bill pulls funds from, it also takes \$489,732.50 from the Annaly Bay Road, \$300,000 from Durant Tower Construction, \$240,241.52 from the St. John Parking Facility, and another \$250,000 from funds set aside to construct a police substation, among other sources.

All the funds are either monies remaining from completed projects, or funds sitting unused while the government pays debt service.