

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Coffelt Says She Would Be 'Honored' To Reside In Estate Catherineberg As Governor

VIC News / **Published On June 02, 2017 10:44 AM /**

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ST. THOMAS -- Gubernatorial Candidate Soraya Diase Coffelt said recently that she would be "honored" to reside in Estate Catherineberg, the sprawling West Indian Company-owned mansion sitting atop Denmark Hill, that is [set to become a museum](#).

"I would be honored to live at Catherineberg," Ms. Coffelt said. "It is a beautiful building with spectacular grounds and an amazing view. If it smells musty, that's probably because it is kept closed. I took a tour during the American Cancer Society's fundraiser early this year and found it to be quite impressive. Lots of beautiful mahogany furniture, paintings and antiques. Did not see any mold! By the way, was it ever really tested for mold or was that just a rumor?"

Ms. Coffelt's comment on Catherineberg was made Wednesday. She was responding to a direct question seeking to learn whether she would live in Government House, or at the Ritz-Carlton, where current Governor Kenneth Mapp [resides when in St. Thomas](#).

Ms. Coffelt, whose candidacy announcement was made during a well-planned event at [Gertrude's Restaurant in St. Croix on Tuesday](#), is attempting to run a campaign that seeks to highlight her contrasts with Mr. Mapp. And her stance on the matter of the governor's residence comes as the governor is poised to sign into law a measure approved by 32nd Legislature lawmakers that would turn Estate Catherineberg into a museum. It's an idea that Mr. Mapp favors.

To be clear, Catherineberg, although it has served as a residence for multiple governors, is not the official residence of Virgin Islands governors; Government House in St. Thomas is. Nonetheless, because of its expansiveness and history, it was willingly occupied by past leaders, including Governor Charles Turnbull. Mr. Mapp's predecessor, John P. de Jongh, resided at his own home.

With Catherineberg set to become a museum, if she were to be elected, would Ms. Coffelt live in Government House? Her position on that matter is vague; she acknowledged that Virgin Islands law provides that the governor reside at Government House in St. Thomas. But, she said, "That building has been extensively renovated into offices though. Practically speaking, we can't be spending money on renovating it back."

Ms. Coffelt's last comment suggests that she would be in favor of lawmakers changing the law that requires governors to live in Government House, St. Thomas. However, such a move would require additional legislation authorizing the purchase of property and subsequent construction of a new home for the territory's chief executives.

But with territory's treasury constantly struggling to keep liquidity after being rejected by the bond market while seeking funding to offset a \$100 million structural deficit, though lawmakers would find the funds to construct the new governor's mansion, it would come from coffers already strained, and monies that could be used to shore up critical government services.