

The Virgin Islands Consortium

USVI And U.S. Dept Of Veterans Affairs To Collaborate On Veterans' Health Issues

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ST. THOMAS -- During a meeting at Government House here on Wednesday, Governor Kenneth Mapp and officials of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs agreed to collaborate more closely to expand and to improve services to veterans in the territory, Government House has announced.

The VA representatives at the meeting included interim Deputy Secretary Scott Blackburn, Acting Under Secretary of Health Dr. Poonam Alaigh, and Acting Under Secretary of Benefits Tom Murphy. Representing the VI Government, in addition to Mr. Mapp, were Veterans Affairs State Director Patrick Farrell, Lt. Governor Osbert Potter and National Guard Adjutant General Deborah Howell.

Mr. Mapp, stating that the territory's hospitals are larger than patient census can justify, restated his offer to donate space in each facility for use as a Veterans Health Clinic,



Governor Mapp's meeting with US VA at Gov't

House in St. Thomas. (Government House)

And in an attempt to further promote the strengthening of the relationship with the VA, the territory's leader also proposed that the VA begin using certified local labs for clinical services required for veterans, especially the hospitals' labs. He also requested that bureaucratic adjustments be made to speed up the VA payment of claims for services provided to vets, modeled after the method used by the federal government to pay Medicare claims.

Mr. Blackburn and his colleagues were receptive to the governor's proposals and suggestions, acknowledging that veterans in the Virgin Islands require and deserve the same services available to veterans elsewhere, and that travel off-island for health care is burdensome, according to Government House. Mr. Blackburn stated that the VA's main priority is prevention of suicides by veterans, which led to a discussion about how mental health services can be improved.

Both parties agreed to appoint staff members to collaborate and find solutions to any obstacles to progress on the issues discussed, according to Government House.