The Virgin Islands Consortium

With Half A Billion Dollars For USVI At Stake, Senate Will Host Session On Thursday

Politics / **Published On November 28, 2017 07:56 PM /**

Staff November 28, 2017

With $500 million in low-interest loans already approved for the Virgin Islands Government through federal disaster relief funding, there's only one action remaining before the first drawdown -- $300 million, according to Governor Kenneth Mapp -- becomes available, and that's ratifying a measure that ascertains repayment to the federal government.

The senators first met on the matter and a slew of other measures forwarded to the body by the governor a week ago, but lawmakers delayed all action. Instead, senators will meet on Thursday and are expected to move quickly on ratifying the agreement between the GVI and the federal government.

Speaking during his press briefing on Monday, Mr. Mapp urged the senators to pass the measure, Bill No. 17-0844, stating that delays come with consequences. "I'm mot making that comment as any criticism, I”m just giving you the reality of what’s happening," he said.

According to the transmittal letter from Government House to the Legislature, the first measure would authorize the G.V.I. to enter into an agreement with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which would pave the way for the G.V.I. to receive hundreds of millions of dollars in FEMA community disaster loans. Congress recently approved $500 million in low-interest FEMA community disaster loans for the G.V.I., but because the funds are loans, the local government must agree to pay those funds back and, as in any debt obligation deal, provide collateral — which in the G.V.I.’s case is usually Gross Receipt Taxes or Matching Fund remittances (rum cover over). In order for the Mapp administration to enter into such an agreement with FEMA, the Senate must approve.

Another measure, dubbed the Virgin Islands Source Separation Act, would require residents to start separating their wastes before they are removed by the Waste Management Authority and its contractors. The belief is that once the separation of waste occurs, off-island companies with an interest in waste would see value in purchasing the territory’s refuse, as the waste would have already been separated.

A third bill would authorize and appropriate $9 million to fund the completion of phase two of the Frederiksted Economic Revitalization Project (Paul E. Joseph Stadium). Mr. Mapp has proposed $6 million from the proceeds of the Limetree Bay Terminals bitumen project; $2 million from the Community Facilities Trust Account; and $1 million from the St. Croix Capital Improvement Fund.

Mr. Mapp also forwarded a bill that would amend the Virgin Islands Horse Racing Industry Assistance Act of 2010 to include anti-doping provisions, a territorial horse racing commission, and to allocate revenues. Two zoning measures — one to authorize the dredging and maintenance of Krause Lagoon and the Cross Channels on St. Croix to return to operating depth of -36ft, and another to allow the entire marine terminal in Gallows Bay to come into compliance with the Costal Zone Management Act, and to authorize the demolishing and reconstruction of the 3,010 square-foot arrival building — were also forwarded to the body, along with another measure called the “Virgin Islands Beverage Container Recycling Act”.

Correction: Nov. 30, 2017

A previous version of this story incorrectly stated that members of the 32nd Legislature were to meet for a session on Wednesday. While the senators met on Wednesday, it was for a Committee of the Whole hearing. The session will be held on Thursday, Nov. 30.