

The Virgin Islands Consortium

In Rebuke To Mapp And FEMA, Senators Override Veto On Debris Burning Ban

Environment / **Published On December 22, 2017 10:23 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **December 22, 2017**



A CAT-branded excavator loads debris into an air curtain incinerator on the south shore of St. Croix on Dec. 13, 2017 (Ernice Gilbert, VIC)

ST. THOMAS -- Warning that the government would run out of time if it fails to rid the territory of roughly 700,000 cubic yards of vegetative debris left behind by Hurricanes Irma and Maria by March 20, 2018 -- the federal government's cutoff date to fully pay for the removal of debris -- Governor Kenneth Mapp [last week vetoed a bill](#) that sought to ban the burning of vegetative debris by the Government of the Virgin Islands, claiming that pollutants from the debris would be detrimental to the health of the territory's

residents.

On Thursday, as promised by Senate President Myron Jackson -- and with the Senate having more members present who supported the ban -- the 32nd Legislature overrode Mr. Mapp's burning ban veto 12-2, disrupting the Mapp administration's and FEMA's plan to burn about 35 percent of the debris. Senator Novelle Francis, who told The Consortium [last week](#) that he would not immediately participate in an override attempt, forsook his own words and joined with the majority in the override, stating that while he did not have a problem with some burning, he took issue with the locations where the burning would occur.

"I'm not totally opposed to burning. What I do have is an objection to the places where burning is schedule to take place," Mr. Francis said.

The same reasons highlighted during past Senate meetings discussing the ban were brought to the fore again, along with new ammunition from an Army Corps of Engineers video showing a [massive debris-mulching operation currently ongoing in PR.](#)

Throughout [#PuertoRico](#), a massive operation to remove more than 3 million cubic yards of debris churns on. Just outside of Ponce, the Recovery Field Office has established a bustling collection site in the El Tuque Quarry to collect vegetation, or veg, debris. ? : Patrick Loch
pic.twitter.com/kQJTCR2bMd

— USACE HQ (@USACEHQ) [December 5, 2017](#)

Thursday's session, where senators overrode a number of Mr. Mapp's line-item vetoes, was one filled with heated back-and-forth banter between lawmakers, the most standout episode being between Senators Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly and Alicia Hansen. Mrs. Hansen and other minority caucus members had objected to what they thought was Mr. Jackson's protracted introduction of the burning ban bill (Mr. Jackson was speaking about the mulching effort in Puerto Rico, among other topics as part of his introduction of the bill), stating the he should simply introduce the measure and allow the session to move forward.

That sparked a colorful exchange between Mrs. Hansen and Mrs. Rivera O'Reilly, who had told Mrs. Hansen to sit down. "I ain't taking no seat," Mrs. Hansen fired back, a response that would only rile Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly further. "You need to sit down," Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly demanded, to which Mrs. Hansen responded, "Are you out of your mind?" Mr. Jackson's motion passed 11-3, with the 12-2 override following soon after.

Lawmakers also overrode a provision in the community disaster loan (CDL) bill that sets aside \$6.25 million for the Legislative and Judicial branches of government. Mr. Mapp had scolded senators for the line items, stating that the funds were to be used in specific areas and for specific reasons, none of which, the governor suggested, included the aforementioned branches of government. The override also makes law a provision demanding that contracts signed by the Public Finance Authority at a recent meeting, which took place before the Legislature took action on the CDL, are to be subjected to approval by the Legislature.

Another veto override makes law Bill 32-0161, which makes available \$4 million for the Legislature to pay rent for office space in Strand and King streets in Christiansted, as well as for the eventual purchase of a building in Golden Rock, which senators have said will serve as a the permanent location for not only the Legislature, but potentially the judicial branch of government on St. Croix.

In other action, lawmakers approved three of Mr. Mapp's recent nominations, including Lee Steiner to serve on the V. I. Port Authority Governing Board in the St. Thomas district; Johann Clendenin to serve on the Public Services Commission in the St. Croix district; and Vaughn Hewitt to serve on the VI Housing Authority Board in the St. Croix district.

Also approved were two Coastal Zoning Permits -- one to establish a beach to the east of the Cruz Bay ferry dock, and another to allow the replacement of a wooden dock by the Carden Beach Association on St. Croix. The zoning request was from the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, which sought permission to bring a halfway house located in Estate Glynn into compliance with zoning.

While senators either dealt with or commented on a number of measures and issues -- including the situation concerning V.I. National Guard Soldiers, who after three months following Hurricane Irma [had yet to be paid in full as of Tuesday](#) -- lawmakers reverted back to the ban on burning.

Senator Positive Nelson echoed what he said during a press conference he [held on Tuesday](#). The senator said those who opposed burning were largely silent on emissions produced by the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority and the former HOVENSA refinery.