

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp's State Of The Territory Address Set For Jan. 22. It Will Be His Last Before Seeking Reelection.

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ST. THOMAS -- Governor Kenneth Mapp will address the U.S. Virgin Islands on January 22 in his fourth State of the Territory Address (SoTA) since taking office. The SoTA, traditionally held at the Earl B. Ottley Legislative Hall, will take place at 7:00 p.m., and has been the platform used by governors to layout their plans for the territory.

This year's SoTA, observers say, will be Mr. Mapp's most consequential yet. The governor is seeking reelection in November, and will hope to set a foundation aimed at shaping the minds of the electorate in his favor.

Senate President Myron Jackson told The Consortium early Wednesday that he expects to hear Mr. Mapp lay bare his plans for education, the healthcare system and other critical areas of government.

"I expect to hear from the governor about the dynamics of the state of affairs of the territory. We have critical health issues that the territory is confronted with -- we're sending our medical patients out of the territory on a daily basis because of inadequacies at the hospitals," Mr. Jackson said. "I need to hear about the direction that we're going in healthcare in reference to the rebuilding of our hospitals, and before we even get to the rebuilding, the temporary facilities with FEMA [the Federal Emergency Management Agency] that should have been in place at this point, that have not.

"I want to hear about education and the efforts relative to the schools that have been condemned by the administration, and what's the plan of action as we deal with the inadequacies and challenges at the Department of Education," he added.

Mr. Jackson spoke of the infrastructure challenges, mentioning the poor condition of the territory's roads. And he said he'd like to hear how Mr. Mapp intends to incorporate resiliency into the infrastructure of the islands.

During his last SoTA, Mr. Mapp [seemed to place the USVI at a crossroads](#): one path, he said, would lead to a bright future with job growth, economic resurgence, improved healthcare, paved roads, reduction in crime, and an improved education system for the territory's youth. The other path saw the islands being led down a long, difficult road of economic depression à la Puerto Rico.

"On one hand our economy is stronger than ever and growing, but on the other we need to address the cash flow issues in the public sector. We have financial challenges, which require real action on all our parts," he said.

The path chosen, Mr. Mapp added, would be dependent on Senate action on his five-year economic growth bill which included the much-derided sin tax measure, or a similar alternative that the governor believed would allay the wariness of the bond market in buying the territory's bonds. He then painted a bleak outlook if the Senate failed to act.

"If we do not act, I want you to know that by the second pay period in February, the Government of the Virgin Islands may not have enough money to make its payroll," Mr. Mapp warned. "If we do not act to authorize meaningful measures to eliminate our structural deficit, we will create a serious domino affect across our community. So let us take real action to bring our territory to fiscal health, not for the investment community, but for us now and generations to follow.

"If we don't take decisive action, jobs will be lost and services will be curtailed due to the reduction in cash flow."

Since then, the sin tax measure [was signed into law](#), but the bond market continued to downgrade the territory's bonds further into junk status. The downgrades were so swift that Mr. Mapp [eventually broke ties with the ratings agencies](#).

Even before Hurricanes Irma and Maria, which came six months after Mr. Mapp's promises made in his 2017 SoTA, the roads were not fixed, and senators were constantly

sending out press releases assailing the administration for its slow pace in addressing the territory's thoroughfares.

Mr. Mapp, even as he is expected to highlight his administration's efforts following the storms during this year's SoTA, will have show more action than words in 2018 if he is to be reelected, political observers say. The governor, while making a long list of promises, has yet to deliver tangible results on many, these observers say, and while the hurricanes may provide some leeway in explaining why certain projects were either stalled or had not started, it will not be enough to save the governor -- in office for over three years -- from Virgin Islanders anxious to see the USVI move forward.

Correction: Jan. 22, 2017

A previous version of this story stated that tonight's State of the Territory Address will be the governor's third. However, it will actually be his fourth. The story has been updated to reflect the correct information.