

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Senate President Says SoTA Was Upbeat, But Lacked Details

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ST. THOMAS -- In a release issued Tuesday morning, Senate President Myron Jackson said that the 32nd Legislature continues to be willing to work with the Mapp administration on the many challenges of rebuilding the territory after the devastation left by hurricanes Irma and Maria, and improving the financial condition of the Virgin Islands, following an encouraging State of the Territory Address presented by Governor Kenneth Mapp at the Earl B. Ottley Legislature.

Recapping the successes of his term as well as the disaster recovery efforts, Mr. Mapp gave an overview of what he inherited at the start of his administration and touched on his vision for the future of the Virgin Islands.

"I think overall the presentation was upbeat, although it was missing some details," Mr. Jackson said.

Among the information lacking in the report were specifics on many issues including housing, healthcare, the Government Employee Retirement System, and agriculture among other concerns, Mr. Jackson said.

According to the release, many of the territory's residents who are in rental homes are facing the stress of eviction in a limited housing market, for example. Revitalizing the historic districts could assist owners with rebuilding their properties, he said, adding that "there is a shortage of funding for housing, and these buildings can be used for temporary and permanent residences and add to the economic transformation of our towns."

"We have a crisis," Mr. Jackson said. "Our residents are looking for affordable housing and it is not an attainable goal in a short time span."

Also vague were answers regarding the status of medical evacuees and when they would be realistically returned to the territory; plans to build modular units to replace destroyed hospital facilities; and addressing mental health care in the Virgin Islands," said the Senate president.

Another major concern included the lack of relief in the agricultural industry for farmers who have lost their livestock, fruit and vegetable produce, and infrastructure in the September 2017 natural disasters.

"I'm very disappointed and disheartened to hear of their plight," Mr. Jackson said. "The administration should have had in place a plan to assist our livestock farmers. We could put local, fresh meats, vegetables, greens, eggs, and milk on the table. It's unconscionable that we've not been able to assist."

Mr. Jackson said he wished the speech touched on fixing roadway erosion and toppled light poles to make night driving at major intersections safer. Clarity on the school for St. John; a new hotel on St. Croix; and the government's pension plan was also desired.

"I leave this State of the Territory Address no more clear on the proposal for the administration to address the unfunded liability of G.E.R.S., aside from looking for more qualified board members which should have been done some time ago," Jackson said. "Collaboratively, I'd like the Senate to sit down with the Governor so we can have a comprehensive approach."