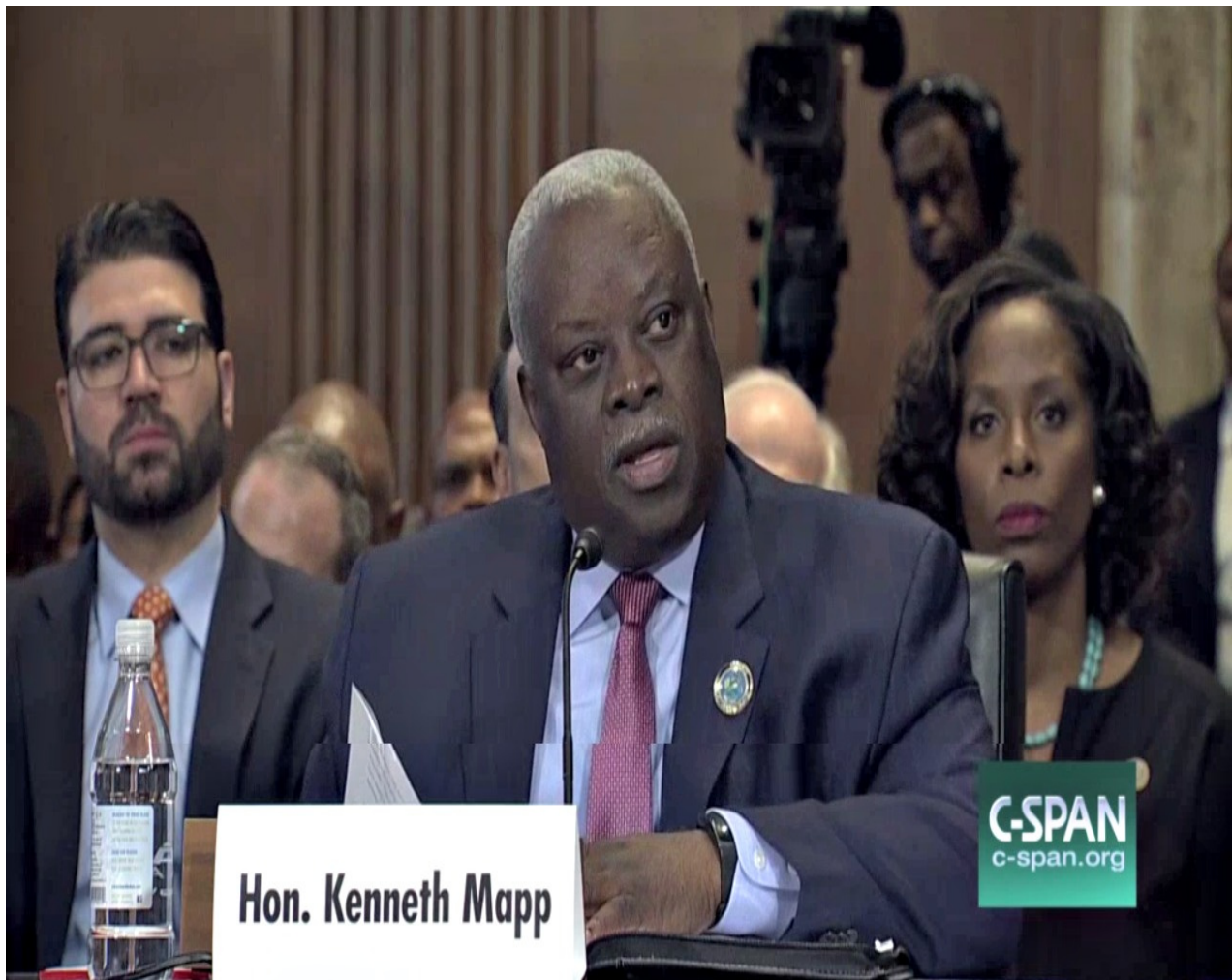


The Virgin Islands Consortium

Analysis | With Federal Dollars Pouring In, It May Be Difficult To Beat Mapp In November

Business / **Published On February 05, 2018 12:16 PM /**

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Governor Kenneth Mapp, as of now, is not among the most popular governors the U.S. Virgin Islands has seen. His mouth is [unbridled](#), sometimes [vulgar](#). He [disrespects journalists](#), is believed to be vindictive by many Virgin Islanders, and recently defended himself in a Consortium interview against allegations of being a bully.

Before Hurricanes Irma and Maria mercilessly battered the territory, the administration was struggling to meet payroll, with Valdamier Collens, Dept. of Finance Commissioner, on [multiple occasions](#) in February 2017 warning of the government's diminishing cash-on-hand situation. A month earlier, in January 2017, the government was seeking over \$100 million to bridge a budget deficit of roughly \$100 million, but it was rejected by the

bond market.

That rejection served as a wake-up call to both the legislative and administrative branches of government, sending both scrambling for solutions. All this time, unemployment remained high, the economy was anemic, and the territory's infrastructure crumbling.

When the leaders eventually came up with a solution, it became among the least popular ideas in the Virgin Islands, so much so that it sparked territory-wide [protests](#). Mr. Mapp, bewildered as to why residents were not in favor of supporting the taxation of rum, tobacco and sugary drinks, [warned](#) of shortened, four-day workweeks and the scaling back of essential government services if the measure was not approved by the Senate. "We have on the agenda closing the government one day every two weeks until September 30 [of 2017]. That could include closing the schools for a full day on a Friday," the governor said in February of 2017. "'Lack of cash means non-ability to pay for; non-ability to pay for means that we will be unable to require public workers to perform."

The bill wound up passing, and Mr. Mapp [signed it into law](#) -- a move that only added to his -- and the 32nd Legislature's -- unpopularity.

As the early months of 2017 progressed, the governor started fielding more criticism for projects that he promised would commence years prior -- [including the rebuilding of roads and the Paul E. Joseph Stadium](#) -- but had yet to start. Mr. Mapp, as of early 2017, was in his third year in office and had yet to fulfill some of his most prominent promises. And with the three major U.S. ratings firms continuously downgrading the territory's bonds below junk status, finding a path to sustained liquidity seemed near impossible. (Mr. Mapp, frustrated with the ratings firms, [cut ties in August 2017](#).)

There appeared to be no respite for a governor who had been criticized for most of his tenure for a myriad of reasons, among them his [expensive lodging](#) while in St. Thomas, and what many saw as [irresponsible spending on vehicles](#) at a time when the territory was struggling to stay financially afloat (Read: [Mapp, Potter Show Off Fleet Of Brand New Suburbans At Agrifest](#)).

Then, without warning, September came, bringing along two [deadly](#) and [ferocious](#) storms that would send the U.S. Virgin Islands into a tailspin, destroying thousands of properties and leaving behind wreckage that will take years to overcome. But along with the devastation that Irma and Maria wrought, the hurricanes also presented the governor with a talisman: It brought in, by U.S. law through the Stafford Act, an overwhelming amount of federal support -- from the immediate emergency response, to the continuing recovery effort, spending hundreds of millions of dollars.

In December, the federal government [approved a \\$500 million low-interest loan](#) to the V.I. government, with the first drawdown of \$250 million to \$300 million, already being released. These dollars will help the government with a budget deficit nearing \$300 million. Just last week, Mr. Mapp announced a combined \$1 billion in federal aid -- [\\$766 million for Virgin Islanders whose homes were affected by the storms](#) but had not previously qualified for housing financial aid from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and [\\$243 million from the U.S. Housing and Urban Development](#), funds Mr. Mapp said would hasten the process of placing in homes Virgin Islanders displaced by

the hurricanes.

And that's aside from the hundreds of millions of dollars [FEMA has been pouring into the Virgin Islands](#) through other grants -- road cleanup contracts, which is providing hundreds of jobs to formerly unemployed residents, and millions of dollars for restoration of power. There's also an impending effect of additional construction work from settled insurance claims that may help bolster the governor's chances.

With the high availability of jobs, though limited to certain fields, the economy is expected to improve. When economies improve and people are earning money, they feel better about themselves and their future. Such trends usually benefit a sitting leader -- in this case, Mr. Mapp.

This is not to say that the governor is assured another four years. There's a lot of dysfunction in government, and most departments and agencies are still struggling to provide adequate service. Eleven schools, according to Mr. Mapp, have been abandoned, and the hospitals are in such bad shape that [not even laid off workers can get relief through unemployment](#). The roads are still in unacceptable condition, and the salaries of government workers, including teachers, are way past due an increase. (Asked about raising the salary of teachers, the governor said he [could not say what month or year that would happen](#).)

But with the economy seeing strong activity through opportunities in the construction field, renters seeing their fortunes rise through FEMA placements; businesses getting low-interest loans through the Small Business Administration, and FEMA dollars flowing into the territory for the foreseeable future, unseating Mr. Mapp will be a challenge. A challenge made more difficult by the crowded field of Independent and Democratic candidates seeking to remove him this November.

Feature Image: Governor Mapp address the U.S. House Committee on Energy and Commerce during a trip to Washington in November.