

The Virgin Islands Consortium

11 Senators Are Traveling To Seatrade In Florida

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Ernice Gilbert March 03, 2018



Eleven senators, to include Senate President Myron Jackson, will head to Seatrade Cruise Global from March 5-8, Mr. Jackson confirmed to The Consortium on Saturday. Mr. Jackson will return to the territory on the 9th of the same month. While he's away, Vice President Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly will lead the body.

Senators attending the event will be Marvin Blyden, Janelle Sarauw, Tregenza Roach, Bryan Smith, Mr. Jackson and Jean Forde from the St. Thomas-St. John District. Attending from the St. Croix District will be Senators Neville James, Novelle Francis, Sammuell Sanes, Alicia Hansen and Kurt Vialet.

Last year, about four lawmakers [made the trip to Florida](#), a considerable drop [from the 9](#) who attended in 2016 after being on the receiving end of a backlash from residents who viewed [the trip](#) as an expensive vacation on the backs of taxpayers. This year, Mr. Jackson highlighted the importance of having strong representation from the Virgin Islands at the important event, gleaned ideas and collecting information on how to jolt the USVI's cruise industry, already anemic before Hurricanes [Irma](#) and [Maria](#) slammed the territory in September. Now, the local government is bracing for a projected year-over-year drop of 20-30 percent in cruise ship arrivals.

Also attending Seatrade will be Governor Kenneth Mapp and his team, officials from the Department of Tourism, the West Indian Company and the Virgin Islands Port Authority.

Held every year in March, Seatrade Cruise Global is the world's largest gathering of who's who in the cruise industry. It brings together cruise line executives, media, speakers, port representatives, ship builders and vendors to discuss most aspects of cruising in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Mr. Jackson sees attendance to this year's event by lawmakers from both districts as paramount to shaping policy that could boost the territory's critical tourism product.

"This particular year is very important for the territory, given the two Category 5 hurricanes," Mr. Jackson said. The senator recalled the July 2017 gathering of cruise industry officials in St. Thomas, where local officials were [told to innovate or watch as the territory gets left behind](#) in the cruise line business, steamrolled by more innovative and quick-acting Caribbean destinations.

Remembering the points made at the meeting, Mr. Jackson said his 2018 Seatrade trip, along with the other lawmakers, will be a very active one, spending considerable time at the visitor's booth interacting with participants interested in doing business with the territory, as well as conference attendees considering the territory as a destination. "This year we have to tell our story even stronger, or even more engaging that we are up, we're not a 100 percent, but your experience coming to the territory today or in any subsequent time during 2018 is still a wonderful experience to have, given the challenges that we face," Mr. Jackson said.

The senator, who has attended Seatrade every year except as a freshman, said he has always been impressed and amazed by what other destinations are doing from a modern context with their ports. "That has provided me the assistance to really craft legislation to improve our ports," Mr. Jackson said as he highlighted an initiative of his that would see the development of a festival park at the West Indian Company.

Mr. Jackson said it was important to him to explain the reason that lawmakers attend Seatrade, adding that the news of their traveling and the cost thereof, and not the substance of the trip, are the most capitalized on in such stories. "I catch hell for it," he said.

The senator also stressed the importance of lawmakers attending the four-day affair to stay informed on the constant changes occurring in the Caribbean region -- including the development and innovations at other ports of call -- as well as growth of the global cruise business. "The Caribbean has to continue to have a good representation and engagement with the cruise industry as growth on the global stage impacts our market

and our economy," he said.

[Here's a look](#) at this year's events. See key discussions [here](#).

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