

The Virgin Islands Consortium

One Week After Returning From Seatrade In Florida, Senators Have Yet To Provide Report

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The [11 senators who made this year's trip to Seatrade Cruise Global](#) in Florida between March 5-8, and were set to return to the territory on the 9th of the same month, have yet to issue either a joint or separate releases on the results of their expedition.

The trip, which also included at least one staff of each of the 11 senators, came at a time when taxpayers in the U.S. Virgin Islands could least afford it, after facing two disastrous hurricanes in September of 2017 that brought the already anemic USVI economy to a standstill.

The senators who attended the conference, according to Senate President Myron Jackson, were Marvin Blyden, Janelle Sarauw, Tregenza Roach, Bryan Smith, Mr. Jackson and Jean Forde from the St. Thomas-St. John District. Those who attended from the St. Croix District were Neville James, Novelle Francis, Sammuel Sanes, Alicia Hansen and Kurt Vialet.

Two days before the senators left, Mr. Jackson told The Consortium that this year's Seatrade was of particular importance to the territory because of the 2017 storms. "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. With the importance of this year's event highlighted as paramount, it was expected that one week later the lawmakers would have already crafted press releases sharing what was gleaned from the conference, and how they intended to affect change armed with the new information.

Seatrade is not a cheap affair; it's the world's largest gathering of who's who in the cruise industry, and brings together cruise line executives, media, speakers, port representatives, ship builders and vendors to discuss most aspects of cruising at a multi-day conference in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Early registration for the event, which takes place annually in March, varies, but the price typically ranges above \$1,000 per individual. For example, [an article](#) on PRN News Wire promoting the event, showed "super early bird" ticket costs of \$1,599 for VIP All Access; \$1,099 for an individual to attend the full conference; and between \$799-\$999 per individual for groups. Early bird prices, often offered to entice registration, usually go up as the event gets closer. And then there's the cost of travel, hotel stay, dining and transportation among other costs, that are associated with attending such events.

No senator has provided the costs associated with their trip. And they did not provide an itinerary before leaving that would build the community's confidence in the reason for the expensive expedition, which many residents have seen as a jaunt. The Consortium's Editorial Board opined that 11 lawmakers making the trip to Florida was a [blatant waste of taxpayer money](#).

A call placed to Mr. Jackson on Thursday afternoon for comment was not returned.

The conference is annually attended by the Virgin Islands Port Authority and the West Indian Company, both with critical interests because they run the territory's ports where the cruise lines call. The Department of Tourism, responsible for sustaining and growing the territory's tourism product, attend annually. V.I.P.A., WICO and D.O.T. use the information gathered at the event to help shape their strategies for the year and beyond, and rarely share such information publicly. They also use the opportunity to feverishly promote the territory -- their presentations include dances, music and other attractive strategies. [\[Watch: USVI's Caribbean Dancers Perform At Seatrade 2018\]](#).

But the senators, elected by Virgin Islanders, have a duty to report to the people their findings, and how the new information would be used to ultimately grow the territory's tourism product.

At least some information about the trip was provided during a Wednesday Senate hearing by V.I.P.A. Executive Director David Mapp. He said cruise line officials continue to complain about the lack of activities provided on St. Croix. "Many of these new arrivals voiced a common theme — St. Croix needed to improve its shore excursions experience for their guests," Mr. Mapp said. "Additionally, at last week's Seatrade Global Conference, during a meeting with various cruise executives, it was also pointed out that our current transportation system for cruise passengers needs to be vastly improved. We were told modern, air-conditioned buses for transporting cruise guests are being used by our neighboring competition and the VI is expected to follow suit."

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