

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Senate Approves Slew Of Bills In First Session Of 2018

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ST. THOMAS -- Lawmakers in a daylong session at the Earl B. Ottley Legislative Hall on Wednesday, approved several bills, among them a property tax relief measure and funding for the dredging of the Schooner Bay at the Gallows Bay Port on St. Croix.

The session was the first of 2018, and it came with the usual flare between senators of the majority and minority caucuses. Even so, in the end, a number of important bills were ratified by the 32nd body, and will be forwarded to Governor Kenneth Mapp.

An important measure, [Bill No. 32-0188](#), related to the transforming of the Gallows Bay Port, sponsored by Senators Kurt Vialet and Alicia Hansen, sets aside \$3.5 million from the Capital Improvement Fund for the dredging of Schooner Bay, which V.I. Port

Authority Assistant Executive Director, Damian Cartwright, told The Consortium was needed before development of the port into a [world class destination for luxury cruise ships](#) could become a reality.

Also of great significance is Bill No. 32-0030, which was crafted with St. John in mind, an island that has multiple villas and resorts, and where property taxes could increase beyond what local St. Johnians could afford.

The legislation creates a \$5,000 property tax credit for homeowners and homestead properties with certain caps. Properties that are valued at up to \$750,000, are eligible for 50 and 90 percent of the \$5,000 property tax credit. An amendment by Senator Positive Nelson limits the tax credit to the island on which the property is owned.

The bill was originally sponsored by Senator Janette Millin Young, but it was special-ordered to the Senate floor by majority caucus lawmakers, who contended that Mrs. Millin Young and her minority caucus counterparts were dragging their feet -- a claim that was disputed by the minority caucus.

Yet even with the back and forth, the bill and the amendment passed with all but one vote -- Mrs. Millin Young's -- while Mrs. Hansen abstained.

Lawmakers also approved the following measures:

[Bill No. 32-0168](#), which seeks to bring current the territory's insurance laws.

[Bill No. 32-0130](#), called The Virgin Islands Criminal Street Gang Prevention Act, the measure makes more stringent the punishments for crimes related to gang activity. The bill also creates what is called the Crime and Gang Prevention Fund, to provide intervention as well as prevention programs.

[Bill No. 32-0147](#), which aims to clear the path for the practice of telemedicine in the USVI.

[Bill No. 32-0028](#), which requires the Adjutant General of the Virgin Islands to administer the About Face and Forward March programs.

[Bill No. 32-0065](#), which sets aside \$500,000 to the Economic Development Authority for the purpose of "energy efficient" retrofitting of the Industrial Park on the island of St. Croix

[Bill No. 32-0026](#), which seeks to strengthen regulations for veterinarian operations, including animal shelters and pet shops.

[Bill No. 32-0178](#), A resolution to honor and commend the All Hands and Hearts—Smart Response, charity.