

The Virgin Islands Consortium

In Bloodletting, Mapp And Forde Make Bitter Dispute Over D.O.E. Hearing Public

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ST. CROIX -- Governor Kenneth Mapp during his Friday press conference on the state of education, where Mr. Mapp made multiple major announcements relative to the preparedness of the Department of Education for the 2018-19 school year, Mr. Mapp took a moment to respond to Senator Jean Forde, who said during a Wednesday Senate hearing that Mr. Mapp had instructed D.O.E. officials not to attend a Committee on Education, Youth and Recreation meeting scheduled for April 3.

Mr. Forde, who chairs the mentioned committee, did not give details about the email discussions between himself, D.O.E. Commissioner Sharon McCollum, and the governor that led to the standoff. He only said that Mr. Mapp had instructed D.O.E. officials not to

attend, and even assailed the governor during the hearing, stating that Mr. Mapp's directive to D.O.E. officials was a clear violation of law. Mr. Forde and his colleagues moved to subpoena Ms. McCollum, setting the stage for a bitter public clash between the governor and the senator.

The governor returned fire at Mr. Forde during his Friday press conference, assailing the senator for what Mr. Mapp deemed as political theater, and a determination by Mr. Forde, because of a personal issue with D.O.E. relative to [the suspension of Lisa Forde](#), Mr. Forde's wife, in regards to \$8,000 that was stolen from the Adelita Cancryn Junior High School office, to scold D.O.E. officials. Mrs. Forde serves as principal at the school, and was suspended for 60 days while pending an investigation.

"I know that the chairman of the committee has personal issues with the Department of Education because of his spouse and the disciplinary action exacted on his spouse. I'm not going to get into the details of that, but it is his responsibility to focus," Mr. Mapp said. "Focus on the needs of the children, focus on the schools, focus on the parents, and focus on the professional staff. You have plenty time to deal with issues that are personal. And I don't think that I asked for anything that was unreasonable. I don't think that that's an unreasonable request for a governor to make to a senator." The governor said he reached out to Mr. Forde only after the senator had rejected D.O.E. officials request for a postponement.

The postponement was requested by Ms. McCollum on March 23 after she received correspondence from Mr. Forde's office for the hearing on March 20. At the time, Ms. McCollum said D.O.E. officials were on Easter break and would not be available before April 13. Then on March 26, Mr. Forde's office responded by stating that the senator would not postpone the meeting, and that its planned April 3 date would not change. On the same day, March 26, D.O.E. officials again explained to Mr. Forde, this time in more detail, why having the hearing on April 3 would be futile.

"As we discussed, of the individuals invited to testify, the commissioner, insular superintendents, deputy superintendent, engineer, Business and Budget director and deputy of maintenance will be out of the territory. Superintendent [Colleen] Williams will be attending a Florida and the Islands Comprehensive Center planning session, preparing for our transition to the SPM design. Superintendent [Dionne] Wells is attending to medical concerns, the commissioner is on vacation and the maintenance deputy will be out of the territory. Deputy Superintendent [Vaughn] Hewitt will be at a Housing board meeting and Business Director [Gerda] Sebastien is out of the territory attending to a family medical emergency," D.O.E. wrote to Mr. Forde.

The senator, however, was not having it. "Warm and fraternal greetings, as always! On behalf of Senator Forde, it is my duty to regretfully inform you that the hearing scheduled for April 3, 2018 will held as planned, based on the scheduling needs of the committee and the body," reads the email sent from Mr. Forde's office. By then, D.O.E. officials reached out to Mr. Mapp's chief of staff, Eugene Farrell, about the situation.

The next time Mr. Forde's office received email communication on the matter was on April 2, when Mr. Mapp told Mr. Forde via email that he had been made aware of the back and forth, and that he had asked Ms. McCollum to request from Mr. Forde a delay of the hearing until after Friday, April 6, because some big announcements relative to

education in the territory would be made at the press conference.

"I'm advised today (April 2) that the request to postpone the hearing has been denied by the chairperson of the committee," Mr. Mapp wrote. In the same email, the governor addressed Ms. McCollum, who was cc'd. "Commissioner, by way of this email, I'm advising you that no member of the leadership team of the Dept. Of Education is authorized to appear before any committee of the 32nd Legislature before Friday, April 6, 2018," he wrote. Ms. McCollum acknowledged the directive and said she would abide by it.

The governor in a followup email told Mr. Forde that his intention was not to block D.O.E.'s appearance at the hearing. "Just to be clear, it is not my intention to forestall the meeting of your committee. My intent is to delay the appearance of the D.O.E. before your committee pending my announcement of major issues affecting the department, its operations and personnel. I acknowledge my earlier email should have distinguished the difference," the governor wrote.

Mr. Forde responded by stating it was too late to postpone. "This will serve as acknowledgement of your correspondence. With all due respect, I am having a difficult time correlating what your press conference has to do with the Legislature's hearing on April 3, 2018. Nonetheless, please be advised that given this last-minute correspondence, the Committee on Education, Youth and Recreation will proceed to hold its meeting as planned," Mr. Forde wrote.

On Friday, Mr. Mapp said he didn't believe his request was unreasonable. "In fact the chairman said April 13 could not work, but now it works because he issued a subpoena," Mr. Mapp said. "The Department of Education will go, they have a plan to report to the Legislature in terms of how we're going to go forward, and I renew my request of cooperation and participation of the Legislature in the reconstruction and the recovery of the Virgin Islands."

On Friday afternoon, Mr. Forde threw some admonishing of his own. "Eight months with no movement is unacceptable," Mr. Forde said. "Where is the urgency on the part of the administration? The record will reflect, contrary to the statements of the governor, that the Department of Education requested to delay its appearance before the Committee because much of its leadership team would be on extended Easter vacation until April 13, not because of a planned press conference, as documented in the emails I have provided to the press. How can all the Department's leadership take extended vacation periods at the same time, while our teachers and other hardworking employees must report to work? This is unacceptable."

Indeed, the email correspondence showed that Mr. Forde -- while he denied D.O.E. a postponement even if the department argued that most officials would be out of the territory when the hearing was being held -- only received correspondence of the planned press conference when Mr. Mapp personally responded via email on April 2, one day before the planned hearing.

"When the governor sent his email on April 2nd, one day before the hearing, it was the first time that I or my staff was notified that the governor intended to make any public announcement regarding education," Mr. Forde said in his Friday afternoon press

release. "Any statement to the contrary is simply untrue and I have made the emails publicly available to prove it. While I respect the Office of the Governor and the governor as an individual, his attempt to imply that I was personalizing the issue is not only false but also unbecoming of an individual with integrity."

For your perusal, see the emails [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

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