The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Says Albert Bryan Left Dept. Of Labor In 'Bedlam', And Left Virgin Islanders With $15 Million Bill For Island Crossing

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ST. CROIX -- The Democrats are still jockeying to win the primary election set for August 4, but that did not stop Governor Kenneth Mapp from ripping into one of the contenders, Albert Bryan, on Monday while filing his election documents at the Elections System here.

While waiting to file, Mr. Mapp took issue with Mr. Bryan's slogan, which reads, "Change Course Now". The governor said changing course now would mean moving away from the billions of dollars coming into the territory, and losing the relationships forged with the

White House and Congress over the years.

"If we're marching into $7.5 to $8 billion of recovery dollars and changing the financial condition of the Virgin Islands and creating these jobs and having massive inflows of private capital in the economy, 'Change Course Now' means you're going in the opposite direction. So you're going to walk away from money, you're going to walk away from resources, you're going to walk away from private sector investments. You can't just have a slogan," Mr. Mapp said. Applause from the dozen or so cabinet members who joined the governor at the Elections System followed.

Asked by The Consortium for a response to Mr. Bryan's criticism that the Mapp administration hadn't done much for the three and a half years it's been in power, the governor's answer was preloaded: "He's sleeping," the governor quipped. "You can't see anything when you're in bed sleeping, you have to get up and come outside."

Mr. Mapp then commenced the lambasting, blaming Mr. Bryan for the condition of the Department of Labor, and for leaving the territory's residence with a $15 million bill to pay for Island Crossing, the area where Home Depot is located that was supposed to be buzzing with commerce with a variety of businesses, but has yet to see any new projects.

"Let's just be honest, that candidate took a department and threw it in complete bedlam; it's under serious federal review," Mr. Mapp chided. "That same candidate chaired the [Economic Development Authority], gave out a $15 million grant -- a free $15 million gift to the folks at Island Crossing for the construction of Home Depot here on St. Croix. Asked that candidate where is the rent. Why is the people of the Virgin Islands servicing that loan 100 percent with no value coming back to the people of the Virgin Islands? That's just a free gift and giveaway. Is that the course we're going to take in the future?"

To this day, Mr. Bryan's LinkedIn profile lists among his accomplishments his leadership in securing the Island Crossing deal.

Caribbean Development Partners, LLC (C.D.P.) the firm that was given $15 million to build Island Crossing, envisioned the project as an area bustling with commerce. The government’s $15 million commitment was based on projected economic growth for St. Croix, which would see additional tax revenues once Island Crossing development matured.

C.D.P. promised to develop the area with a mixture of affordable housing, retail stores, restaurants, medical office buildings and other establishments. In August of 2014, Josh Tate, vice president and managing partner of C.D.P., said Burger King and Save-A-Lot were to start operations at the then-budding shopping and affordable housing development.

Mr. Tate had promised some 150 to 200 construction jobs during the process of development for Burger King and Save-A-Lot, as well as 30 to 40 permanent jobs. He also said financing for the projects had been secured.

Since then, however, C.D.P. has failed to deliver. Island Crossing only has some affordable housing that sees tenants paying rent for 15 years, after which they have the option to purchase. Meanwhile, C.D.P.’s anchor tenant, Home Depot, whose monthly rent is a mere $8,000, has filed suit against its landlord. Asked about the reasons for the suit, Attorney Kevin Rames, who represented C.D.P. at a May 2017 Public Finance Authority meeting, said he would produce the case number that would allow this reporter to seek out the details, instead of telling the reporter directly. But he did refer to the Home Depot case as having no merit.

The singling out of Mr. Bryan, while in a negative light, might wind up boding well for the once-wobbly candidate, who regained his footing following a well organized announcement of his running mate Tregenza Roach. The direct hit from the governor puts Mr. Bryan, not his opponents, in the spotlight, giving the candidate an opportunity to respond.