

The Virgin Islands Consortium

At Campaign Kickoff Event, Mapp Takes Sharp Aim At Opponents

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ST. CROIX -- Governor Kenneth Mapp kicked off his reelection bid at his Sion Farm headquarters across from Cost-U-Less on Friday night with some zingers, chiding gubernatorial candidates Allison Petrus and Albert Bryan for remarks they have made on the campaign trail.

The event, which was live-streamed on The Consortium, saw a respectable turnout, although most of the people stood on the side and at the back. Many were supporters of the governor, others, it appeared, were curious to hear what the territory's current leader had to say, and others simply came to enjoy the music as Spectrum Band from St. Thomas and Krossfyah out of Barbados was scheduled to play.

The event kicked off in earnest about 8:30 p.m., with various supporters preceding the lieutenant governor and governor with supporting remarks.

When Mr. Potter came on stage, he appeared to exhibit a new level of energy that had been lacking as of late. And he, too, zinged at opponents, and said his relationship with Mr. Mapp has been great so far.

"People said me and the governor would be fighting after a year. They bet that I was going to quit about after two years because nobody could work with Governor Mapp. The word was out that we were not going to run again. But I'm telling you it is a pleasure being your lieutenant governor. It is an honor being your lieutenant governor. It is an honor working with Kenneth Mapp as governor of the Virgin Islands," Mr. Potter said.

Mr. Potter also jested, stating that he knew some people from other gubernatorial teams had attended the campaign kickoff to monitor the event. Addressing those individuals, Mr. Potter said they should stay and join the team, eliciting laughs from the crowd. Mr. Potter's speech, which was without notes, was strong, and gave the sense of a man who was confident in his role even as he understood its limits.

But it was the governor who took direct aim at his competitors, calling them out by name and sharply criticizing some of what has been said on the campaign trail. To be sure, Mr. Mapp spoke of what he said his administration has accomplished, and on several occasions mentioned the billions of dollars that have become available to the territory under his leadership. But he fired some direct shots on Friday night and in so doing set the tone for the campaign season.

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The first candidate Mr. Mapp took aim at was Mr. Petrus. The governor said Mr. Petrus had gone on local radio to say that even an "idiot" could have been the governor, and the territory would still receive the billions of dollars from the federal government following the hurricanes. Mr. Mapp capitalized: "No one can make a common sense argument that it mattered not who was the governor of the Virgin Islands, that the U.S. government was simply going to come down and put \$8 billion in the governor's lap. And they can't make that argument because after [Hurricane] Hugo, how many billions we got? After [Hurricane] Marilyn, how many billions we got? After [Hurricane] Lenny, how many billions we got? And after [Hurricane] Omar, how many billions we got?"

"So when Ally Petrus says on the radio even John Doe Idiot would have gotten the \$8 billion, it didn't matter who the governor was -- I served with Ally Petrus in the Senate and I have respect for him -- and I want to tell him stop saying that because you sound like John Doe Idiot," Mr. Mapp fired. He later added salt to the wound: "So what we want you to do in this campaign, [is] before you move your tongue, engage your brain." The crowd erupted with laughter.

On Mr. Bryan, the governor again took aim at the candidate's slogan "Change Course Now", stating, "He says it's too many billions, you got to runaway from that."

The Mapp-Potter campaign kickoff event goes to St. Thomas tonight.