

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Was There A Double Standard With How Lisa Forde And Sharon McCollum Situations Were Handled? No, Mapp Says

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The principal of the Addelita Cancryn Junior High School, Lisa Forde, was suspended and investigated based on a suspicion that she had a role to play in funds stolen from the school's safe. Mrs. Forde, the wife of Senator Jean Forde, [was later cleared by Attorney General Claude Walker](#), with Mr. Walker stating, "I found that the evidence is not supported by probable cause to take any action. The facts and circumstances are insufficient to cause a reasonable person to believe that a criminal offense has occurred. This matter is, at this time, closed." Mr. Walker added that with two Category 5 hurricanes ravaging the U.S.V.I. and many of its schools — including Addelita Cancryn

— it was difficult to tell who could have stolen the funds.

Before the case was closed, Mr. Mapp had mentioned it in a response to Mr. Forde during a back-and-forth between the two men relative to the no-show of Department of Education representatives at a hearing organized for March by a Senate committee chaired by Mr. Forde. "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 [sniped during the bloodletting](#).

All this went on in March and April. Fast-forward to late May and early June, following the release of an Office of the Inspector General investigation, which concluded that D.O.E. Commissioner Sharon McCollum had used "bad judgement" when she utilized a government-owned generator for use at her home without the government's consent following Hurricane Irma. The governor's response to this matter pales in comparison to the action exacted against Mrs. Forde.

Asked if he saw a contrast with the way Mrs. Forde was treated compared to how the McCollum matter was handled, Mr. Mapp sought to distance the incidents as being sharply different in nature, and said he based his stance on the missing funds matter based on information that was provided to him. The governor went into detail -- including the amount that went missing at the school -- in an attempt to give an understanding as to why his responses were different.

"The principal's husband, who is a senator, asked me to look into it, and what I did was I asked for a copy of the personal file to be sent to me so I could read it," the governor told The Consortium following Monday's portrait unveiling of Governors Charles W. Turnbull and Roy L. Schneider at Government House on St. Croix. "What I found when I read that was 1), you had collected this money from parents and students, the rule in your school was you're supposed to deposit that money at the end of the day, which the bank is across the street where that money is deposited called Banco Popular. You did not do that, you put that money in a safe, then somebody comes in and breaks the safe, it's sixteen thousand, eight hundred and something dollars, but only eight thousand is missing and the thieves or whoever it is broke in, left the other \$8,885 there and then closed the safe back.

"And then when you read you find that there are other issues with money with that principal in the last administration for which they had to go and restore and bring money back to the table to cover for dollars that were missing. So I don't think it's the same thing, and at the end of the day, the government of the Virgin Islands has to restore that \$8,000 that the parents and the students donated for their athletic clothing; we can't ask the parents to pay again. So the Treasury has to put that money back, so I see a distinct contrast in terms of one over the other," the governor concluded.

While Mrs. Forde was cleared by the A.G., it was concluded by Inspector General Steven van Beverhoudt that Ms. McCollum had acted inappropriately and used bad judgement. The Office of the Inspector General's investigation concluded that the generator should not have been moved to the commissioner's home, and more importantly it should not have been connected. The I.G.'s office also concluded that the administration of Ivanna Eurdora Kean High School — where the generator was originally in use — should have

been notified of the move; and the generator probably could have been used in some other capacity for the Department of Education or the Government of the Virgin Islands.

The I.G.'s investigation was launched following a rumor that circulated on local radio alleging that Ms. McCollum had taken the generator for use at her home. The generator was taken from the Eudora Kean High School's Talapia Farm and moved to Ms. McCollum's residence by D.O.E.'s assistant director of maintenance. It stayed at Ms. McCollum's home from September 2017 until it was moved to a warehouse at the Addelita Cancryn Junior High School on January 22.

In defending her actions, Ms. McCollum told the I.G. in an initial interview that she took the generator to her home to protect it from being stolen, stating that copper theft at the Eudora Kean High School had influenced her decision. However, the reports of the copper wire theft at the school's gym were made weeks after school started on October 9, and based on the statements of Kean High's principal and the teacher in charge of overseeing the Tilapia Farm, the generator was missing from the Tilapia Farm when they returned to assess Kean High after Hurricane Maria had passed in late September — weeks before the copper theft occurred. According to Mr. van Beverhoudt, Ms. McCollum could not explain this contradiction and maintained her position that the generator was exposed and unprotected at Kean High, so it was moved to her residence to be secured.

In a second interview, the commissioner said she had frequently worked from her home and therefore she believed her utilization of the D.O.E. generator was justified.

According to the report, Ms. McCollum repeatedly denied that she had the generator moved to her residence for the purpose of energizing her home while she was without city power. She stated that the generator was placed in the driveway of her residence in "plain sight" and that there was no attempt to conceal it. She further stated that she possessed two smaller generators for her personal use. However, Ms. McCollum acknowledged that she eventually had the generator connected to her home, but indicated that this was done after the generator was already on her property for a period of time.

"Based upon the results of the investigation, it is our conclusion that the commissioner of Education acted inappropriately when she utilized the generator to energize her personal residence," Mr. van Beverhoudt said. "While we cannot specifically determine whether or not the Commissioner had the generator moved solely for this purpose, we believe that the Commissioner should have used better judgement during the handling of this matter.

"Furthermore, the administrators of Kean High should have been explicitly informed that the generator was moved in an effort to avoid any confusion.

"Although it may not have been powerful enough to provide sufficient electricity for areas of Kean High, we believe that the generator could have been utilized in another capacity to support hurricane recovery efforts within Education or at other government locations," the inspector general concluded.