

The Virgin Islands Consortium

VI Carnival Committee Has Gone 'Rogue,' Senator Rivera-O'Reilly Says

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Ernice Gilbert **August 21, 2018**



ST. THOMAS -- The VI Carnival Committee, after multiple attempts by lawmakers to get a complete reading of the committee's finances to no avail, was accused by Senator Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly of going rogue.

The lambaste came during a Committee on Finance budget hearing at the Capitol Building here on Monday, after testifier Halvor Hart, who serves as executive director of the Virgin Islands Carnival (sometimes called St. Thomas Carnival) Committee, had initially failed to furnish complete financial records to lawmakers. Instead, Mr. Hart only provided records of the 2018 \$545,000 the committee received from the Government of the Virgin Islands to put on the VI Carnival, even as the VI Carnival Committee's gross

total was \$837,369.01 -- leaving an unaccounted difference of \$292,369.01



Halvor Hart

Mr. Hart immediately came under fire from lawmakers not pleased with the partial information. The senators were even more incensed because it was only June that the Committee on Workforce Development, Consumer Affairs and Culture [had subpoenaed](#) the carnival committee after it failed to provide detailed accounting information, and the no-show of key carnival committee members.

Why is the carnival committee putting a cloud over themselves? Why are you not accounting for \$290,000 in detail? - Kurt Violet.

On Monday, however, lawmakers' patience arrived to a tipping point. "Let me you ask you a question," Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly offered, "if there is nothing to hide, what impedes

the committee from sharing information?" The question was directed to Mr. Hart, who responded by stating that information was provided in the documents submitted. But Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly, unsatisfied, pushed back. "That only speaks in detail to the funds that are given to you by the Government of the Virgin Islands. It does not include any detailed information beyond those dollars. Are you aware of this? Yes or no." Mr. Hart said he had provided a profit and loss statement relative to the funds raised outside of the government's \$545,000.

We are not asking you to tell us who your sponsors are... but how you spend that money is still the business of the people of this territory. - Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly.

Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly, known for doing her research and digging out information from testifiers, was unsatiated. She told Mr. Hart that just as he had furnished [detailed numbers](#) relative to the \$545,000 provided by the government, she needed such detail accounting of the remaining \$292,369.01. "If you have nothing to hide, why is the committee not complying?" she asked.

Mr. Hart said the information relative to sponsors was confidential and could not be provided. But Mr. Rivera-O'Reilly immediately rebuked him: "We are not asking you to tell us who your sponsors are... but how you spend that money is still the business of the people of this territory."

She then charged, "Well, you are rogue."

Taking a break from Mr. Hart, Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly trained her sights on Davidson Charlemagne, chairman of the Crucian Christmas Festival (sometimes called St. Croix Carnival), asking him to respond to allegations of corruption. Mr. Charlemagne told Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly that whatever documents the committee requested would be furnished. "If you want receipts, if you want open books, doesn't make a difference for us. We don't get sponsors besides the Virgin Islands government and we go down to the nail with it."



Davidson Charlemagne

Senator Kurt Vialet, chairman of the Finance Committee, sensing the path the hearing would take with Mr. Hart not having detailed financial information, told Mr. Hart to go get the documents. But the directive to Mr. Hart was not before Mr. Vialet attempted to satisfy his own bewilderment. "Why would you not submit that?" the senator asked, referring to the VI Carnival Committee's financial records relative to private funding. "I don't understand why you would not submit the details for all the monies received by the committee. Why is the carnival committee putting a cloud over themselves? Why are you not accounting for \$290,000 in detail?" Mr. Vialet asked.

Giving in to pressure, Mr. Hart said he could go to the VI Carnival Committee's office to retrieve the information. "But you were asked to do it. I'm not getting that. You were asked already to do it. That was the whole gist, if I have it right, of the last time you were before this body. Why would you not walk with that information?"

Mr. Vialet said the government could move to cut about \$300,000 from the VI Carnival Committee's budget to match the unaccounted \$290,000 that the committee refused to provide. "Because if you're not going to detail all the monies that you are getting, then we are fools, literally. Because we're giving money and you have almost \$300,000 that you are refusing to detail how you're spending that money. And I don't think that that is fair to the Government of the Virgin Islands that is now your main sponsor."

Mr. Hart was permitted to leave the hearing to collect the information at the committee's office. He returned soon after with the information, which, among other things, showed that the carnival committee's payroll was satisfied through private funding and not the government allocation.

Senators, however, said they did not have enough time to go through the numbers, as there was another government arm, the Department of Tourism, waiting to give testimony.

The St. John Festival Committee also testified at the hearing, and requested \$550,000 for its 65th anniversary event, set for next year (the recommended 2019 budget for the St. John Festival is \$320,000). The recommended Fiscal Year 2019 budget for the VI Carnival is \$545,000, and the Crucian Christmas Festival Fiscal Year 2019 budget recommendation is \$520,000.

Feature Image: Senator Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly. (Credit: VI Legislature)