

The Virgin Islands Consortium

33rd Legislature Senators On The Move

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Senators who make up the 33rd Legislature have been on the move lately, setting up meetings with important local and federal government arms seeking information that would help them make informed decisions on behalf of constituents.

In the past few days, the legislators have held information-seeking meetings with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Economic Development Authority, FEMA being an indelible federal agency in the territory's disaster recovery efforts, and the EDA being the overseer of the USVI's most important economic growth program.

The moves keep in line with what many of the new lawmakers vowed during the campaign to do: be a body that aims to hold department and agency heads to task, all in

an effort to build a better USVI.

The meeting with the EDA, organized by the Senate Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture, chaired by Senator Allison DeGazon, was held on Monday. According to the Legislature, Ms. DeGazon said the reason she called the informational session was to understand the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats regarding the stakeholders of the EDA.



Senator Alicia Barnes said the meeting was substantiating as it relates to economic development strategies for the territory. The senator also said she wanted to make sure the EDA do what is necessary “to provide the necessary means to assist local communities, their residents, and private sectors in creating the proper economic and social environment to induce investment.”

The meeting with FEMA was held on St. Croix at the St. Croix Training Annex in the Nissan Building. According to the Legislature, FEMA gave lawmakers an overview of operations and a recovery update. The senators were told that as of February 5, 2019, total federal funding was more than \$2 billion. Funding for FEMA's Individuals and Households program totaled \$85 million, which included housing assistance at \$60 million and other needs totaling \$25 million.



FEMA said total funding for its Public Assistance program was \$1.7 billion; U.S. Small Business Administration \$535.5 million; National Flood Insurance Program \$17.1 million; and Hazard Mitigation Grants at \$22.7 million.

According to information provided by the Legislature's release, it was noted that total obligations for the Public Assistance program as of February 5, 2019, was approximately \$1.2 billion, with 461 requests for public assistance and 552 projects obligated.

Senators were given packages filled with information making known that ongoing work to harden the territory's power grid was well underway. The effort comes with a \$500 million investment from FEMA, funded through the Public Assistance program, and includes the replacement of wooden poles with composite that can withstand 200 mph winds. There's also movement through the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Program to commence a multiyear effort to place the territory's power lines underground.

According to the Legislature, while senators were appreciative of the information provided, they sought more high level, detailed data, the Legislature said, as senators were being overrun with calls from residents seeking information.

Senators present at the EDA meeting included Ms. DeGazon, Senate President Kenneth Gittens, Javan James, Novelle Francis, Alicia Barnes, Marvin Blyden, Donna Frett-Gregory, Dwayne DeGraf, Myron Jackson, Athneil Thomas and Steven Payne. Those present at the FEMA meeting were Ms. Barnes, Ms. DeGazon, Mr. Gittens, Kurt Vialet, Mr. Francis, and Mr. James, according to information provided in the Legislature's release.