

The Virgin Islands Consortium

\$39.5 Million Bill With \$22.9 Million For WAPA Heads To Governor; Sunscreen Ban, Multiple Others Also Sent

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Members of the 33rd Legislature had a packed schedule on Tuesday as they approved a number of nominations, resolutions, and bills. Among them was Bill 33-0101, an Act appropriating \$39,467,909 in Medicaid reimbursements awarded to the territory's medical facilities. Senators re-appropriated the bill's funding on Monday with the bulk of the money, \$22.9 million, going to the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority (W.A.P.A.) to cover debts W.A.P.A. is owed by the local hospitals.

W.A.P.A executive director, Larry Kupfer, testified that the authority has an urgent need for funds since Vitol, which supplies the utility with propane, has threatened to cut off supply if payment is not received.

Senators were of the consensus that while the bill is not perfect, all of the stakeholders received some funding, with the exception of the \$5 million slated for the Bureau of Internal Revenue. Senator Donna Frett-Gregory expressed displeasure during Monday's meeting because of this omission.

The bill, originally Bill 33-0072, was brought before the Committee of the Whole on June 5th where legislators had the opportunity to hear from all of stakeholders affected by it. It was voted out of Committee of the Whole and sent back to the Committee on Finance, then to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary and subsequently before the full body on Tuesday.

Other measures

All of the nominations, resolutions, and other bills that received favorable votes and approval were forwarded to the governor for further consideration.

Senators also voted to approve the governor's nominees: Daryl Jaschen as director of the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency, and Richard Evangelista as commissioner of the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs.

Five resolutions were brought to the floor honoring outstanding Virgin Islanders for their unselfish contributions to the community. Among them, measures honoring a father and son team, Alwyn "Big Al" Baptiste, Sr. and Alwyn "Daddy Jones" Baptiste, Jr. for their contributions to the music industry and to the Virgin Islands as a whole.

Thelma Ruby Schade Youngblood was also honored and commended for her outstanding service and contributions to the Lutheran Church of the Virgin Islands and the Virgin Islands community.

The Virgin Islands Port Authority (V.I.P.A.) celebrated its 50th anniversary on February 11, 2009 and was honored and commended for its many years of service and contributions to the people of the Virgin Islands. V.I.P.A. is described as an economic lifeline of the territory and accounts for eighty percent of the USVI's gross domestic product. The entity owns and operates many sea ports and terminals.

Resolutions honoring outstanding Virgin Islanders approved:

- Bill No 33-0038 – A Resolution posthumously honoring and commending Alwyn "Big Al" Baptiste, Sr. for his outstanding contributions to the music industry and to the Virgin Islands.
- Bill No. 33-0039 – A Resolution honoring and commending Alwyn "Daddy Jones" Baptiste, Jr. for his outstanding contributions to the music industry and to the Virgin Islands.
- Bill No. 33-0057- A Resolution posthumously honoring and commending Janice Pemberton Tutein for her tireless years of educating our youth and her work as a

storyteller and culture bearer, which exemplifies dedicated service to the Virgin Islands community.

- Bill No. 33-0079 – A Resolution honoring and commending Thelma Ruby Schade Youngblood for her outstanding service and contributions to the Lutheran Church of the Virgin Islands and the Virgin Islands community.
- Bill No. 33-0083- A Resolution recognizing 50th Anniversary of the Virgin Islands Port Authority.

In support of the sunscreen ban measure, Senator Steven D. Payne, Sr. spoke about the importance of healthy coral reefs' impact on the territory's fishing. "If we act now, we can actually reverse the damage that has been done."

Other bills approved

- Bill No. 33-0009 An Act amending title 20, Part II, chapter 37, subchapter II, section 407 relating to sale of taxi medallions by adding a new subsection (d) providing a definition of Virgin Islands Veterans for the purposes of the section.
- Bill No. 33-0015 – An Act amending section 105 (f) of title 22 Virgin Islands Code to satisfy the accreditation standards established by the National Association of Insurance Commissioners in its model laws and updating the insurance laws of the Virgin Islands of the United States placing them on par with other United States jurisdictions thereby affording greater and more effective protection to the policyholders in the Virgin Islands.
- Bill No. 33-0016 – An Act amending title 22 Virgin Islands Code, to add a new chapter 20a entitled "The Risk Management and Own Risk and Solvency Assessment Act" which meets the accreditation standards established by the National Association of Insurance Commissioners in its model laws and updates the insurance laws of the Virgin Islands of the United States placing them on par with other United States jurisdictions thereby affording greater and more effective protection to the policyholders in the Virgin Islands
- Bill No. 33-0027 An act amending title 17, chapter 7, section 61a of the Virgin Islands Code to allow the Department of Education greater flexibility in setting the school calendar upon the declaration of a state of emergency.
- Bill No. 33-0099-An Act providing that the Virgin Islands Bureau of Motor Vehicles shall remit to the Department of Finance \$75,000 of the money collected and reserved for the Centennial Commission to be deposited into the General Fund of the treasury of the Government of the Virgin Islands to fund the participation of little league baseball teams in the 2019 Virgin Islands Regional Tournament.
- Bill No. 33-0030 – An Act amending title 11, chapter 21, section 1213 of the Virgin Islands Code by requiring the annual renewal of trade name registration
- Bill No. 33-0043 An Act amending title 27, chapter 9 of the Virgin Islands Code by adding a section 305h providing for a ban on the retail sale or offer for sale, and the distribution or importation for retail purposes of topical sunscreen products

containing oxybenzone and octinoxate.

Bill held

Bill No. 33-0044, pending the call of the chair. The proposal seeks to amend title 3, chapter 16, section 274 of the Virgin Islands Code requiring the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission to implement an electronic monetary payment system.

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