

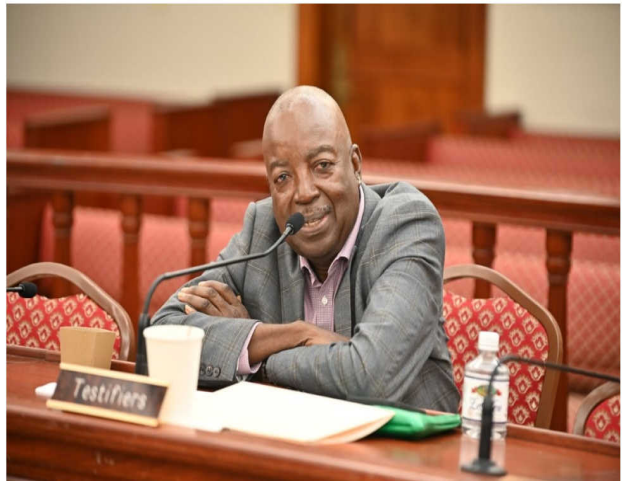
The Virgin Islands Consortium

WTJX Faces Fundraising Pressure and Possible Layoffs as Board Nominees Confront Financial Challenges

WTJX board nominees told lawmakers the broadcaster must intensify fundraising after losing more than \$1 million in federal support, as concerns over possible layoffs, financial oversight and long-term sustainability shaped Thursday's confirmation hearing.

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From left, WTJX nominees Lisa Brown Williams, Osbert E. Potter and Henry E. Schjang, who appeared before the Senate Committee on Rules and Judiciary as lawmakers examined the broadcaster's financial challenges and leadership needs By. V.I. LEGISLATURE.

The financial health of the territory's public broadcaster emerged as a central concern Thursday as three nominees to the WTJX Board of Directors appeared before the Senate Committee on Rules and Judiciary, with discussion focusing heavily on the loss of more than \$1 million in federal funding, the need for stronger fundraising and the possibility of employee layoffs.

Osbert E. Potter, Henry E. Schjang and Lisa Brown Williams, Esq. were considered by the committee, with Mr. Potter seeking renomination to the board. A former chief executive officer of the public broadcaster, Mr. Potter acknowledged improvements at WTJX while emphasizing the significant challenges that remain. "While the station has been making progress, we still have major priorities before us," he said, identifying among them "raising funds for the station in a limited, tough market."

Mr. Potter repeatedly emphasized the need for WTJX to hire a development officer dedicated to generating revenue outside traditional government support. He told Sen. Milton Potter that hiring someone with "strong experience is at this point going to be a key factor moving forward to making sure that we can navigate our financial difficulties at this moment."

Traditional fundraising methods such as telethons no longer carry the appeal they once did, Mr. Potter said, arguing that WTJX will have to adapt by using social media and other avenues to reach potential supporters. "We have to readjust ourselves and realize that we cannot get the funds that we need directly from the government, and because of the present situation," he said. Until a dedicated development officer is hired, Mr. Potter warned, there will be a "big void" in the station's fundraising operation.

"The future of the station remains bright, and I ask for your support to continue my contribution to ensuring that that happens," Mr. Potter told lawmakers at the close of his testimony.

The broadcaster's fiscal challenges, driven in large part by the loss of more than \$1 million in federal funding, were also a major concern for Mr. Schjang. He told lawmakers that his background in regulatory compliance, auditing, financial analysis, investigations, hearings, licensing and operational oversight would help him contribute to the board as WTJX navigates its financial difficulties.

Mr. Schjang previously served as a special assistant for licensing and compliance with the Virgin Islands Casino Control Commission and currently serves on the board of directors of Mid Island Federal Credit Union. He said he intends to bring his experience in "financial oversight, regulatory compliance, and organizational accountability" to WTJX. "I understand that a board has responsibility to ensure that an organization is being governed responsibly, that its financial resources are being properly monitored..." he said.

Although he has not yet been confirmed by the full Legislature, Mr. Schjang said he has spoken with WTJX CEO Tanya-Marie Singh about the challenges confronting the broadcaster. "I was encouraged by our discussion, and pleased that she acknowledged the critical importance of fundraising to the long-term sustainability of the organization," he told the committee.

Mr. Schjang expressed particular concern about Ms. Singh's warning that WTJX may have to lay off employees because of its financial position. "I hope it doesn't get to that. That would be really unfortunate to lose employees because of the funding," he said.

He said the board must "carefully examine the available financial information, monitor expenditures and revenue, identify potential financial risks, explore responsible opportunities for additional funding and partnership." At the same time, Mr. Schjang cautioned that the station's fiscal problems should not overshadow its public-service purpose. The "financial challenges must not cause us to lose sight of the importance of the mission of public broadcasting," he said, praising WTJX's educational and cultural programming.

Sen. Angel Bolques Jr. expressed confidence in Mr. Schjang's potential contribution to the board, describing him as a "very sharp tool in the toolbox."

Ms. Brown Williams, an attorney who worked in the Office of the Federal Public Defender until retiring in 2025, was the third nominee considered Thursday. "I have been an active supporter and consumer of WTJX for years," she told lawmakers, promising to bring "whatever skill sets I possess to assist in the challenge of ensuring not just the continued existence, but the empowerment of public broadcasting."

She said her legal background, experience with disaster recovery projects and participation in nonprofit organizations could benefit the WTJX board. "I'm aware of the challenges that they're facing, and it will be incumbent upon me to sit down and educate myself as best I can with regard to the finances and the short and long term issues," Ms. Brown Williams said.

While WTJX's financial condition dominated much of the hearing, lawmakers and nominees also discussed the broadcaster's need to maintain credibility, increase viewership, attract younger audiences, preserve its role as an archive of Virgin Islands history and culture, and continue improving its infrastructure.

The three nominees received favorable reactions from lawmakers, with Sen. Milton Potter describing the slate as "high-quality." Mr. Osbert Potter, Mr. Schjang and Ms. Brown Williams will now move forward for consideration by the full Legislature