

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Legislators Approve Fiscal Year 2021 Government Budget and 12 Bills, Including Measure Establishing WAPA Oversight Committee

Government / **Published On September 30, 2020 06:54 AM /**

Maxiene K. Cabo **September 30, 2020**



Late Tuesday, lawmakers unanimously approved the government's budget for 2021 just days before the fiscal year begins on October 1. During the session, senators also passed 12 measures and approved Attorney Sigrid M. Tejo-Sprotte and Attorney Alphonso G. Andrews as judge nominees for the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands. All approved measures and nominees will be forwarded to Governor Bryan for further consideration and action.

Among the measures passed was Bill No. 33-0346 — sponsored by Senators Janelle Sarauw and Donna Frett-Gregory — which establishes a Management and Oversight Review Committee for the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority.

In defending the measure during the session Tuesday, Mr. Gittens pointed to what he considered as additional waste at the authority with no one to rein in the spending. Holding up a WAPA document that welcomed the authority's new CFO, William Schmidt, while keeping in the interim outgoing CFO Debra Gottlieb, Mr. Gittens expressed outrage.

"... WAPA just hired a second CFO yesterday for upwards of \$171,000, and intends to keep the current CFO in place for a period of time at \$140,000 a year. And when we're done we say we don't have any money."

He added, "So we're going to have two CFOs now to tell us what? ... And every month somebody getting some outrageous, ridiculous bill, and you want to tell me that you don't believe it's a good idea?" Mr. Gittens was referring to the management and oversight measure.

While there are more bills for legislators to approve, with the session recessed until today, the following bills were passed:

- Bill No. 33-0343-An Act to amend Title 19 of the Virgin Islands Code establishing minimum criteria for members of the Virgin Islands Government and Health Facilities Corporation Board, decreasing the number of its members, and increasing the stipend of its board members
- Bill No. 33-0346-An Act establishing a Management and Oversight Review Committee for the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority
- Bill No. 33-0347-An Act amending Title 17 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 15, section 190dd to provide scholarship benefits for person receiving home instruction
- Bill No. 33-0348-An Act amending Title 27 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 1, subchapter I relating to licensing of medical professionals to provide for a two-year licensure period amending subchapter IIb to repeal provisions that appear in subchapter I and provisions that have become obsolete; and amending subchapter IIb, section 50i to allow physician assistants to prescribe, dispense, and administer Schedule II through V narcotic drugs and non-narcotic drugs to the extent delegated by a physician
- Bill No. 33-0375-An Act appropriating \$15,000,000 from the General Fund to the Waste Management Authority to pay outstanding debts to the waste haulers
- Bill No. 33-0410-An Act providing for the disbursement of monies to the Virgin Islands Economic Development Authority to establish the Small Business Relief Grant Program and the COVID-19 Disaster Loan Program
- Bill No. 33-0417- An Act providing an appropriation for the sum of \$1,500,000 from the Internal Revenue Matching Fund as a contribution to the St. Thomas Capital Improvement Fund for the Fiscal Year October 1, 2020, through September 30, 2021
- Bill No. 33-0418- An Act providing for the remitter of an amount not exceeding 50 percent of the revenues realized in excess of the funds appropriated by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands for the operation of the Government of the Virgin Islands (GERS) in the fiscal year ending September 30, 2020, and for an amount

not exceeding \$50,000,000 to be remitted to the GERS, in the fiscal year ending September 30, 2021, from General Fund revenues realized in excess of the funds appropriated by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands for the operation of the Government of the Virgin Islands, to be used by the GERS exclusively for retirement annuity payments for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2021

- Bill No. 33-0316- An Act amending Title 24 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 3, by adding section 65a expanding the acts of unfair labor practices
- Bill No. 33-0415- An Act to authorize the Commissioner of Public Works to accept the residential roads of Estate LaReine, on the island of St. Croix, into the public roadway system and to utilize the St. Croix Capital Improvement Fund to repair the residential roads in Estate LaReine
- Bill No. 33-0112- An Act appropriating all revenue derived from fees for initial and renewal firearms and ammunition licenses, during the period of June 1, 2019, to May 31, 2022, to the St. Croix Career and Technical Education Center
- Bill No. 33-0358- An Act authorizing the transfer of Government-owned real property located at #51 Hannah's Rest, Frederiksted, St. Croix owned by the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority to the Virgin Islands Police Department for the construction of a police station in Frederiksted, St. Croix and for other related purposes

A previous version of this story, because of a text error, said Alicia Barnes and Kenneth Gittens were the sponsors of the WAPA oversight committee measure. That's incorrect; the bill was sponsored by Senators Janelle Sarauw and Donna Frett-Gregory. We've updated to story to reflect the correct information.