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SENATORS FOCUS ON REDUCING YOUTH CRIME



Education, Culture and Youth committee member Sen. Louis P. Hill provides an explanation to Chairman Liston A. Davis (sitting), while Sens. Norman Jn Baptiste, Alvin L. Williams and Carlton "Ital" Dowe listens in, with Sen. Ronald E. Russell in the background.

The Committee on Education, Culture and Youth conducted a series of hearings on St. Croix and St. Thomas where senators heard from department officials, scholars, non-profit organizations, community activists and residents on the various aspects of youth crime.

"Youth crime is a holistic problem...it is the intention of the Committee to examine youth crime as a totality, with components of cause, prevention, punishment and rehabilitation," said Chairman Liston A.

Davis.

Senator Davis along with committee members Shawn-Michael Malone, Carlton "Ital" Dowe, Norman Jn. Baptiste, Louis Patrick Hill, Neville A. James and Terrence "Positive" Nelson met on St. Croix with Labor Commissioner Albert Bryan, Human Services Commissioner Christopher Finch, Attorney General Vincent Frazer, Police Commissioner James McCall, Law Enforcement Planning Commission Executive Director Meredith Nielsen

and then Acting Education Commissioner Dr. Laverne Terry.

Lawmakers continued hearings on St. Thomas by taking testimony from representatives of Virgin Islands Community Foundation, About Face Inc., UVI Eastern Caribbean Center, Economic Development Agency, Project Safe Neighborhoods, Board of Education and VI Behavioral Services.

The causes of juvenile delinquency highlighted by the presenters included failure in school, child

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Legislative cable channel begins broadcasting historical segments

The Legislature's government access cable channel, shown on Innovative Cable TV Channel 5 on St. Croix and Innovative Cable TV Channel 17 on St. Thomas, began providing more than live gavel-to-gavel broadcasts of all legislative hearings, meetings and sessions when the channel provided additional television programming in February.

Senate President Usie R. Richards said the new programming began February 1st with the airing of legislative profiles of former councilmen and legislators. "We think that it is important for the people to know about the history of the Legislature, while at the same time understand the process by which the Legislature actually works," said Richards.

Public Affairs Director Hectito Francis indicated that as the Legislature upgrades its broadcast capabilities; additional programs will include interviews with lawmakers, weekly updates on legislative activities and a live call-in show discussing specific legislation pending before the Body.

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Community needs to be positive role model for youth

abuse and neglect, lack of parental control, drug abuse, increased poverty and gang membership. The hearings revealed that 494 juvenile petitions were filed for delinquency in the Superior Courts, and 254 youths were remanded to the Youth rehabilitation Center between October 2006 and September 2007.

Testifiers said **developing and funding youth crime prevention activities, providing parenting programs, establishing high quality childcare programs and**

redeveloping a cohesive relationship between neighbors were essential in preventing youth crimes. They added that punishment for youthful offenders should be evaluated by the judicial system on an individual basis and allow family court judges different options in imposing punishment rather than mandating they send minors to institutions.

Rehabilitation efforts recommended for offenders included **meeting with and compensating victims,**

being accountable and accepting responsibility, developing community interests, receiving alcohol and drug treatment and attending mentoring and counseling sessions.

Senator Davis added that the adults have an important role in contributing to the prevention of youth crime saying, "Our youth often emulate the conduct of their elders and more of us in this community should try to be positive role models for our children."



Committee on Education, Culture and Youth Vice-Chairman, Sen. Shawn-Michael Malone makes a point regarding youth crime issue to Attorney General Vincent Frazer.

Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services members tour hospitals



Karen Hodge, Vice President of Facilities Management for the Schneider Regional Medical Center conducts a tour of the facility for Health Committee members Sens. Basil Otley, Jr., Carmen M. Wesselhoft and Norman Jn Baptiste.

The Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services conducted tours of the Juan F. Luis Hospital and Medical Center on St. Croix and the Schneider Regional Medical Center on St. Thomas and spoke with administrators, doctors and employees in an effort to determine if the health facilities in both districts were adequately staffed and equipped to provide the best health care services possible to residents.

Committee Chairman Norman Jn Baptiste said the Committee visited the facilities after convening a number of public hearings where testifiers expressed concerns that the hospitals lacked medication and supplies, low employee morale and long waits for specialized medical

treatment. According to Senator Jn Baptiste, residents also complained about the quality and affordability of dialysis, cardiology and oncology services.

The Health, Hospitals & Human Services Committee also addressed issues such as mold and air quality in public buildings, the status of HIV/AIDS infection, STDs (sexually transmitted diseases), mental health, homelessness and poverty levels in the Territory. Chairman Jn Baptiste said he has sponsored legislation appropriating funds to supplement the operations of charity and community organizations because their efforts in combating the community's social ills must be appreciated and supported.

Body approves Dr. La'Verne Terry to lead Education Department



Senator Liston A. Davis congratulates Dr. La'Verne Terry on her senate confirmation as Commissioner of Education.

After the majority of senators rejected controversial nominee, Dr. Lynn Spampinato, in October 2007, Governor John P. deJongh's second candidate was accepted with confidence and optimism.

Senators voted 11-4 in favor of Dr. La'Verne Terry to lead the Department of Education on March 18, 2008.

Policymakers were confident Commissioner Terry's knowledge, professional skills and experience

were essential tools in addressing the challenging issues within Education.

Majority Leader **Celestino A. White, Sr.** said, "The lady on paper, the lady in theory, the lady in actuality is ready to serve in the capacity as commissioner of education."

When appearing before the Committee on Rules & Judiciary, Terry said she plans to implement WorkKeys, a national certification program that will prepare

high school students with technical skills for the workforce, improve the bilingual programs and execute a plan that will restructure the special education programs through the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM) used on the national level.

"I'm really impressed with what you're saying and you're really hitting on these core issues that affect our education system," said Rules Committee Chairman **Carlton "Ital" Dowe.**

Lawmakers move to guarantee public beach access

The Committee on Planning and Environmental Protection met with officials from the Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR) to address the controversial issue of the right of the public to access, use and enjoy the Territory's shorelines and beaches. Coastal Zone Management's (CZM) Legal Counsel Dalila Patton and Federal Consistency Coordinator Jean-Pierre Oriol provided an analysis of the existing law and how it was enforced.

However, **Committee Chairman Alvin L. Williams** noted that the only way to resolve this long-standing issue was by amending and updating the existing legislation to require V.I. property owners adjacent to the shoreline to provide adequate access to the beach. The

proposal would also create a "Beach Access Fund" that would purchase easements on those properties based on appraised values.

"I am aware that legal research will have to be done by the Department of Planning and Natural Resources regarding the issue of beach access," Senator Williams said, "However, I am determined to remedy this dilemma by legislation to see that land access can be obtained and hope my colleagues support me in this effort."

The testifiers informed senators that CZM was in the process of compiling information to create maps that will pinpoint areas where beach access and easements are available in the Territory, and erect signs to direct the public to those areas. The CZM officials indi-



Senator James A. Weber III asks a probing question during a Committee on Planning and Environmental Protection meeting as Chairman Sen. Alvin L. Williams continues his research.

cated that the map will be available online by June 2008.

Veterans and students demand better services from the government



Senator Celestino A. White, Sr., is flanked by youth testifiers, L to R, Evanna Chinnery, Hadiya Sewer, Jessica Samuel, Malik Stevens and Zenobia Howe during a break in a Committee on Housing, Sports and Veterans Affairs meeting on St. John.

Senators got an earful from veterans and students as the Committee on Housing, Sports and Veterans Affairs held hearings to determine the status of services to veterans and the status of youth recreational facilities and pro-

grams on St. John. During a hearing held on St. Thomas, veterans told senators that they were discouraged by the poor leadership and limited services provided by the regional offices in Puerto Rico. They also called for a national cemetery to be established in both districts, a veterans' memorial complex, an interactive

data base, veterans ID cards and access to National Guard post exchanges. Other issues presented by veterans were the lack of information from the local veterans' affairs office and the veterans' affairs

medical facility in Puerto Rico, reimbursement for medical travel and the issuance of taxi medallions.

The Committee then traveled to St. John where they met a filled legislative conference room of students, parents, counselors and youth program organizers who came to express their frustrations about the lack of adequate recreational facilities and programs provided for young people on the island.

Students told senators that young people felt neglected when the facilities provided for them were neglected by the government and community. They complained about rocky fields, rotten bleachers, overgrown bushes on basketball courts and faulty elec-

trical wiring on ball fields and recreational centers.

Chairman White provided the students an opportunity to directly question the Housing, Parks and Recreation Department Commissioner St. Claire Williams and senior staff on the timetable for improving the playgrounds and recreational centers around the island. White assured the students and their supporters that lawmakers would go beyond simply discussing deficiencies to providing action and oversight in making sure the government upholds its responsibility to providing safe and adequate recreational environments for the young people on St. John and the rest of the Territory.

Senator attends national forum on city accountability

Freshman **Senator Basil Ottley Jr.** recently attended a special presentation of "CitiStat", a real time accountability system which allows government to respond more efficiently thru a 311 system for citizens to report problems.

"CitiStat is an accountability tool based on the

ComStat program which utilized computer pinpoint mapping and weekly accountability sessions that enhances efficiency in the management and delivery of government services to residents," said Senator Ottley.

A member of the Government Operations and

Consumer Protection Committee, Ottley along with Governor John de Jongh's Policy Advisor Karl Knight, was able to witness a demonstration of the CitiStat system from the calls that were made to the responses from the various departments.

"The most impressive

aspect of the system is the immediate responsiveness and accountability that occurs in the areas of Police, Health Emergencies and public infrastructural problems," Ottley noted, "Anyone can call 311, report an issue or problem and it is automatically screened and directed to

the responsible agencies." Ottley indicated that he will request for a presentation of the program locally and is convinced that once it is adapted to the local conditions it will begin the process of improving the quality of life for residents of the Territory.

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Legislature uses tours to inform community



Legislative Legal Assistant Valerie Sibily informs a group from Ricardo Richards Elementary School about the Frits E. Lawaetz complex in Frederiksted, St. Croix and Senator Terrence "Positive" Nelson communicates with young



The Legislature over the years has conducted several guided tours and provides information to both the young and old. Each tour is educational and individuals leave with a better understanding as to the role of the First Branch of Government. Although there may be individuals in our community who are somewhat familiar with the roles of a senator, this information is not shared with our young people.

One of the most recent visits by students to the Legislature was from a group of students from the Ricardo Richards Elementary School on St. Croix. Over 60 3rd grade students, along with teachers and chaperones were able to meet with Senate President Usie R. Richards, and Senators James A. Weber III and Terrence

"Positive" Nelson who welcomed the students and encouraged them to remain focused with their school work and reminded them that the future is in their hands.

Public Affairs Writer **Winston Nugent**, along with **Myrna Pickard** of the Visiting Senators' Office gave an overview on the role of the senate and its committees. Students were questioned as to their knowledge of their elected representatives and were able to leave being more informed.

The Legislature encourages organizations in the community to contact the Legislature's Public Affairs Division to arrange for any possible tours, so everyone can be more informed on the legislative process.

Post Audit, Public Affairs have new home on Education Street



Gerald Pittman, L, and Hollis Vigier put final touches on the new Legislature Annex, located on Education Street.

The Post Audit and Public Affairs divisions recently moved into a new building on Kongens Gade better known as "Education Street" last February.

Maintenance Chief **Vernon Isaac Sr.** said work began in mid-October and his staff been faithfully gutting the structures, laying tiles, painting,

building walls, installing cubicles and installing electrical, plumbing and air-conditioning units.

Vanico Hedrington, Gerald Pittman, Christopher Wilkes, Hollis Vigier, Keith Benjamin and St. Croix employee **Jose Carlos Acosta** worked alongside Isaac on the project.

Ms. Beatrice Fleming,

Linda Adams and **Grace Xavier** from the Facilities Management Division also were instrumental in providing a sanitary structure for the employees.

After renovating, repairing, painting, varnishing and cleaning up the structure, the maintenance employees then moved the desks, chairs, file cabinets, computers, printers, moni-

tors and other equipment and supplies into the building.

Upon completing the task of providing a clean and secure environment for the two divisions consisting of 15 employees, the crew moved operations to St. John where they continued renovations and repairs to the legislative conference room on the

island.

"Our work is never done," said Isaac.

The new telephone numbers for the Legislative Annex are 774-2478, 774-2506, 774-2507 and 774-2508; and fax numbers are 774-2492 for the Post Audit and 774-2495 for Public Affairs Divisions.