

# V.I. LEGISLATURE

## Legacy

Documenting the Legislature's Impact on Virgin Islands History

Volume 1, Issue 1

FEBRUARY 15, 2008

### 27<sup>TH</sup> LEGISLATURE UPHOLDS PLEDGES DURING 2007



Senate President Usie R. Richards greets Gov. John P. deJongh, Jr. during the Governor's second State of the Territory Address while Legislative Secretary, Senator James A. Weber III, looks on.

When the 27<sup>th</sup> Legislature convened in January of 2007, it's members expressed their intention to work in unison to improve the quality of life for all the people residing in the United States Virgin Islands.

They also committed to place the needs of the entire territory above partisan politics in order to establish strong bonds that represent the best tradition of these islands' unique and diverse society.

"In 2007, the 27<sup>th</sup> Legis-

lature strived to fulfill their roles to make laws, set spending limits, oversee government operations and act on constituent concerns during the eight Legislative Sessions convened," noted **Senate President Usie R. Richards.**

Richards stated the majority of his colleagues also followed through on their pledge to improve and enhance the public image of the Legislature, and as President, he made every effort to lead by example, work cooperatively and

maintain a "spirit of decorum and dignity."

Throughout the year, lawmakers remained determined to use their 10 standing committees to battle the long-standing issues and problems, and to discuss, analyze and pass meaningful legislation.

"We responded to the Territory's economic and social needs with a balanced course of action that put the concerns of our community first," concluded Senate President Richards.

### Speedy passage of 2008 budget highlights first year of accomplishments

The professionalism and efficiency lawmakers pledged during the 27<sup>th</sup> Legislature were demonstrated when the Finance Committee wasted no time in passing the Fiscal Year 2008 Executive Budget for the operation of the Virgin Islands Government.

The committee, through its Chairman, **Senator Terrence "Positive" Nelson,** convened and conducted a series of budget hearings from June 26<sup>th</sup> through August 21<sup>st</sup> where senators discussed and questioned executive representatives including commissioners, directors, fiscal officers and other officials on the proposed financial document. Senator Nelson, Vice Chair **Liston Davis** and committee members **Carlton Dowe, James Weber III, Juan Figueroa-Serville, Neville James** and **Ronald Russell** held 27 days of intense discussions with 231 testifiers from 28 departments and agencies, 13 boards and commissions, 12 independent instrumentalities, two hospitals and two medical centers.

(CONTINUED ON PG 2)

#### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Rules Committee Clearinghouse	2
Public Safety on Tap	3
Economic Development Outlook	3

(CONTINUED FROM PG. 1)

## Financial minds come together for FY '08 budget

Health, Hospital and Human Services Chairman **Norman Jn. Baptiste**; Government Operations and Consumer Protection Chairman **Shawn-Michael Malone**; Public Safety, Homeland Security and Justice Chairwoman **Carmen M. Wesselhoft**; Planning and Environmental Protection Chairman **Alvin L. Williams**; and Majority Leader **Celestino A. White Sr.**, who also serves as Chairman of the Committee on Housing, Sports and Veterans Affairs were inti-

mately involved in the discussions relating to the financial conditions of those departments under the jurisdiction of their legislative committees.

Despite his heavy administrative responsibilities, **Senate President Usie R. Richards**, along with minority Senators **Louis Patrick Hill** and **Basil Ottley Jr.** also attended and participated in the budget process as executive and judicial branches' representatives came to justify their budget requests before the

Legislature.

The Finance Committee passed 26 budget bills on September 14<sup>th</sup> and reported them out to the Rules Committee for further consideration. On September 18<sup>th</sup> the Rules Committee passed the measures on to the Full Body which finalized the \$840.4 million FY2008 Budget during a 3-day regular session on September 21<sup>st</sup> completing its legislative responsibilities easily within the September 30, 2007 deadline.



Finance Committee Chairman Terrence "Positive" Nelson, standing left, reviews figures with (from L to R) Sen. Basil Ottley, OMB Director Debra Gottlieb, Sr. Policy Advisor Nathan Simmonds and Post Audit's Tomas Alejandro.

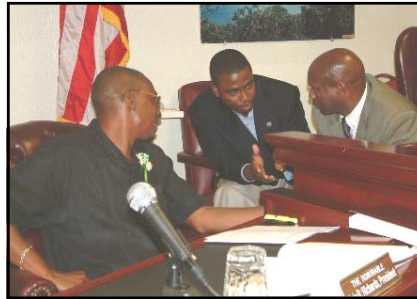
## Rules Committee proves to be effective clearinghouse

*"We responded to the Territory's economic and social needs with a balanced course of action that put the concerns of our community first"*

Usie R. Richards  
President  
27th Legislature

The Committee on Rules and Judiciary, under the chairmanship of **Senator Carlton Dowe**, followed through on its commitment to efficiently consider all executive branch nominees and pending legislation by holding **nineteen (19) committee meetings** in 2007.

There were **thirty-nine (39) nominations** heard during the year;



Rules Committee Chairman Carlton "Ital" Dowe consults with Senators Usie R. Richards, left, and Alvin L. Williams, center.

**thirteen (13) commissioners, four (4) directors, a Chief Negotiator, Attorney General and Adjutant General; three (3) Supreme Court**

**Judges and sixteen (16) board and commission members were also considered.**

Along with **Senator**

**Dowe**, the Rules and Judiciary Committee members which include **James Weber III, Shawn-Micheal Malone, Carmen M. Wesselhoft, Celestino A. White Sr., Alvin L. Williams** and **Senate President Usie R. Richards** also analyzed, debated and voted on **sixty-five (65) separate pieces of legislation** during what many felt was a productive 2007.



Senator Juan Figueroa Serville, right, shares ideas with colleague Norman Jn. Baptiste.

The Committee on Labor, under the chairmanship of **Senator Juan Figueroa-Serville** met with Labor Department officials to address the

status and needs of the Department, and determine if the Workers' Compensation Administration law should be implemented as a separate entity of government, or remain a division under the Labor Department.

**Labor Commissioner Albert Bryan** told senators his department was in jeopardy of receiving federal funds because of its inability

to keep track of and report workers who received training and entered the work force to the U.S. Department of Labor. Commissioner Bryan indicated that the agency was considering using an electronic system called the "America's One Stop Operation System" to track job seekers, and workers' progress for one year. He also noted his plans to merge St. Croix's eight offices to one central location,

and provide an office site on St. John.

Committee members agreed that the issue relating to the Workers' Compensation Administration as an entity needed more research and evaluation. However, they stressed the need for adequate funding for the Administration to expedite medical and disability benefits for injured workers.

## Government Operations Committee confronts multitude of issues

In 2007, the Committee on Government Operations and Consumer Protection, held 11 meetings to consider several bills assigned to the committee and to exercise the committee's oversight responsibility with issues under his jurisdiction. Of those considered, eight were enacted, five were held, and six were vetoed; three out of the six vetoed bills were overridden by the Legislature to become law.

The Committee, under the leadership of Chairman Shawn-Michael Malone, also held a meeting in which senators heard testimony from the Virgin Islands Water & Power Authority (WAPA) on recent issues affecting its operations. Lawmakers also received testimony on a proposal to enact the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority Financial

Reform Act.

The Government Operations and Consumer Protection Committee also held public hearings to discuss matters concerning the Virgin Islands Port Authority and contractor scams in the Virgin Islands. As a result, the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs in conjunction with the Department of Planning and Natural Resources pledged to provide programs to educate the public in an effort to avoid being victimized by contractor scams.

Legislation was also submitted to ensure that any individual that does not perform work agreed upon and refuses to return monies paid will be charged with a felony and to require that all licensed business post/print



Comm. on Government Operations Chairman Sen. Shawn-Michael Malone shares observations with Sen. Liston Davis during a break.

their business license number on any form of advertisement.

"This will give consumers an opportunity to check with Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs to ensure that persons are licensed to perform the work they are advertising to the public," said Senator Malone.

## Lawmakers give major attention to public safety concerns

The Committee on Public Safety, Homeland Security and Justice held multiple meetings during 2007. Under the leadership of freshman Senator-At-Large Carmen M. Wesselhoft, the Committee began tackling long-standing public safety issues throughout the Territory.

The Committee passed Bill 27-0011 to hire 250 police officers, it also authorized the creation of towing rates and established a Witness Protection Program; Bill 27-0013 to establish the Virgin Islands DNA Database and Databank to assist in crime fighting measures; and Bill 27-0026 to prohibit unreasonable excessive and annoying noise levels.



Senator Carmen Wesselhoft, right, lends an ear to, L to R, V.I. Adjutant General Renaldo Rivera, Police Commissioner James McCall and Police Chief Rodney Querrard during a break in a Committee on Public Safety, Homeland Security & Justice meeting.

Senator Wesselhoft and the Committee facilitated a town meeting in Cruz Bay with the St. John Administrators Office, Po-

lice, Fire, Public Works and other officials to answer residents' questions and address a variety of concerns, and held meetings for Police officials to hear concerns from residents and business owners from Smith Bay, Red Hook, Nazareth and Frydenhoj.

The Committee, which include Vice Chair Carlton Dowe and Senators Liston Davis, Norman Jn Baptiste, Ronald Russell, Alvin L. Williams and Celestino A. White Sr. also held hearings on St. Croix for police officers, fire officials and VITEMA to report on efforts to protect public housing residents and filling the security gap left by the defunct Housing Authority Police.

## Senate panel focuses on economic development projects

The Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture met three times during 2007; twice on St. Croix and once on St. Thomas. The Committee, chaired by Senator James Weber III, first met to discuss the status of the economic development projects for St. Croix by taking testimony from

major hotel and casino developers on their respective projects.

The Committee met again on St. Croix to discuss the status of the Virgin Islands Port Authority.

VIPA tenants spoke of the hardships they faced with getting the Port Authority to provide general

repairs and maintenance, while VIPA officials discussed their plans for repairs to both airports and its plans to deal with outstanding issues with the Federal Aviation Administration.

The third meeting was held on St. Thomas with wireless service providers

to discuss issues relative to the industry. As a result of the hearing, legislation was proposed, adopted and signed into law which allows the Public Services Commission to grant "Eligible Telecommunication Carrier (ETC)" status to wireless service providers in the territory.



Senators James A. Weber III and Neville James find a mutual point while perfecting legislation.

# DOCUMENTING THE LEGISLATURE'S IMPACT ON VIRGIN ISLANDS HISTORY

## Division of Public Affairs:

Hectito Francis: Director - Senior Writer  
Eustace Browne: Assistant Director  
Athneil "Bobby" Thomas : Media Supervisor  
Barry Leerdam: Production Supervisor - Photographer  
Kenneth Christopher: Photographer  
Winston Nugent: Media Writer  
Michelle Lawrence: Media Writer  
Jahmel Leonard: Production Technician  
Earl Morris: Production Engineer  
Melissa Charles: Media Specialist  
Reginald Martin: Media Specialist  
Jacqueline Payne: Administrative Assistant



Visit us on the web  
at [www.legvi.org](http://www.legvi.org)

## Reaching out!



Senate President Usie R. Richards watches as a Claude O. Markoe Elementary School student uses a computer donated to the school by the Legislature

Legislative Central Staff employees Monica Andrew, Kathleen Dowling and Echoe Lewis perform at an "Ole' School" Talent Show at the Legislative Complex on St. Croix.



Education, Culture and Youth Committee Chairman Senator Liston A. Davis congratulates Addelita Cancryn Jr. High School Student Aaron George for submitting the winning entry in Sen. Davis' essay writing contest. George's mother, Pauline Arnold looks on.

## V.I. Legislature Legacy Newsletter



Senator Celestino A. White, Sr., standing, confers with Sens. Louis Patrick Hill, left, and Ronald E. Russell, right, during a Committee on Housing, Sports and Veterans' Affairs meeting, while a senate staffer looks on.

The Committee on Housing, Sports and Veterans Affairs, under the leadership of Majority Leader Celestino A. White Sr. passed, among others, four significant measures which would impact the quality of life for veterans and residents seeking housing

## Committee passes homeownership initiatives

and home ownership opportunities during 2007.

Chairman White and committee passed:

\***Bill 27-0069**, providing for the return of excess property formerly known as the Virgin Islands Hotel to the Government of the Virgin Islands to build affordable housing for veterans;

\***Bill 27-0049**, granting the right of first refusal to the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority to purchase government owned property;

\***Bill 27-0072**, renaming the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Park and designating it as the official park of fallen veterans, providing for the erection of a sign in the park and

mandating a park dedication ceremony; and

\***Bill 27-0111**, transferring the housing functions of the Department of Housing, Parks and Recreation to the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority and differentiating functions between the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority and the Virgin Islands Housing Authority.

Senator White said shifting the housing component from HPR to the VIHFA would enhance affordable housing and homeownership because those programs would be administered by an entity with a proven track record as it relates to housing, and at the same time allows an agency to focus primarily on sports and recreational activities.