

SENATORS WEIGH IN ON GOVERNOR'S ADDRESS

Date : January 31, 2019

St. Croix—Senate President Kenneth L. Gittens on Monday, January 28, 2019, reconvened the Body into Legislative session, after recessing on January 14, 2019 during the organization of the 33rd Legislature. Governor Albert Bryan, Jr. requested of the Body, that additional time be granted, and the Legislature acquiesced and reconvened at 7:00 p.m. that evening.

Governor Bryan, in his first Territorial address, was praised by senators for the message of hopefulness. Senate President Gittens, a former police officer, said he was pleased that issues of crime were mentioned, but stated that more details on the rebuilding of the territory would have been greatly appreciated.

The governor declared that the state of the territory was “in distress.” He further indicated that he and his team have been analyzing the critical areas in the government which needed improvement, as well as those areas that are working well and need to be expanded upon.

Senate Vice President Donna Frett-Gregory and Chairwoman of the Finance Committee said that she was elated with the speech. She added, “We are at the juncture where we must talk about one Virgin Islands and how we make these things happen as a people and not as individuals.”

Senate Secretary and Chairwoman of the Committee on Rules and Judiciary, Senator Alicia Barnes said the speech was transparent, realistic and gave a true fiscal picture of the state of the territory.

Senate Majority Leader Marvin A. Blyden, who also serves as Chairman of the Committee on Housing, Transportation, Infrastructure and Telecommunications, said he was pleased that the Governor addressed the untapped marine sector industry and the bevy of jobs that can be realized.

Senator Allison DeGazon, Chairwoman on the Committee of Economic Development & Agriculture said, one of the important areas of the address in her opinion, was the STEAM Program and the fact that agriculture was included. The Senator further indicated that she was pleased that the Governor recognized agriculture and its economic potential to the territory.

In referring to the STEAM Program, the Governor indicated, “Our focus will be on STEAM for our Economy, Service, Technology, Energy, Agriculture, and Manufacturing.”

Senator-At-Large and Chairman on the Committee of Homeland Security, Justice & Public Safety, Steven Payne, Sr. said he was delighted that the governor said he will focus on young people and ensuring opportunities are available to avert them from crime.

Senator Myron Jackson, Chairman of the Committee on Culture and Planning indicated that he would like to see the approach that will be used in moving the Virgin Islands forward and the identification of the administration's economic, social, health, education, and cultural priorities.

Senator Novelle Francis, Jr. stated he was happy with the Governor's goal to create a team work environment among the different branches of government.

Senator Kurt Vialet said although the speech covered several infrastructure and economic issues, it didn't offer much in the way of solutions. Nevertheless, he liked what the governor said about ensuring that individuals in key positions work to execute laws and carry out the mandates that are in place.

Senator Athneil "Bobby" Thomas said he was delighted with the speech. Thomas who serve as the Chairman of the Committee on Government Operations, Consumers, & Veterans Affairs, said what impressed him most was that the Governor gave a balanced vision as to where he wants us to be.

Senator Javan James, Chairman of the Committee on Youth, Sports, Parks and recreation said he hopes the administration will take a long view on C-Tech programs because this is the time of the new generation.

Senator Oakland Benta, Chairman of the Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services said he was encouraged when the governor spoke of pursuing a health strategy that not only captures the needs of our people but allows for the expansion of our capabilities as the economy grows. He added that what really captured his attention was when the governor said, "We will be sending legislation to unify our hospital system finally."

The Chairman of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development, Senator Stedmann Hodge, Jr. said he was impressed when the Governor indicated, "the prevalence of crime was not the root of our problems but rather it was the bitter fruit of entrenched social and economic woes that have plagued our community for generations."

Senator Dwayne DeGraff said while he remains optimistic, the speech should have focused on how he intends to accomplish these issues.

Absent was Senator Janelle K. Sarauw who was off island due to a death in her family.

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