



Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance 1

Legislature USVI

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- 0:00:00 It's a shared course, and the end goal is to assist in keeping our territory clean. And this place is too beautiful to be so filthy, in my opinion, in many areas. As a result of the shortfalls of Waste Management Authority, so Interim Director Griffith, I'm going to go to you with some basic questions and concerns, because I know, number one, in respect to the tires, I passed legislation with the help of my colleagues for the camera that I spoke about tires piling up. On those cameras working, and what's being done in respect to finding an individual that a bill requires you to do in order to diverse them from doing that, moving forward, and generate revenues. So you need to do your part, because it's very important, what's being done in that respect.
- 0:00:53 Well, a couple of things are being done. Actually, the cameras are working. The difficulty we have with the cameras that we have to solve in the Virgin Islands is, every time power goes off, the cameras have to be reset. In the States, that's not an issue. But here, I don't think a week goes by where there's not some type of power surge, so the camera companies aren't accustomed of being called every week to reset and redo. So we're working on that. Question, while you're there. I know in the past, WAPA had solar for the lights at night. Can you do something creative like that to assure, invest in that to assure that you collect the real revenue and divert individuals from doing that?
- 0:01:34 The issue that I struggle with every month is that I have \$20 million owed to vendors, and then when I look to do something like that, that's a real person that I am not paying a bill for that is struggling to pay their employees. So that's why I'm really pushing hard with these garbage collection fees to get to break even. Okay, very well. Also, you spoke to the tires also with staff that you're going to try and have your staff clean the tires, et cetera. Do you have the staff for that?
- 0:02:06 No. For that, we'll hire the staff for it. As soon as I get that \$1.8 million from Mr. Reimer, it's off to the races. Okay. You spoke to, in your budget, about a \$5 million deficit shortfall in your budget and also \$20 million that's owed to vendors. That's a lot of money, and that's why you need to be creative and aggressive in having all these different initiatives roll out effectively. You spoke also to the PSC, I believe, and with the legislation or proposal you have for them when it

comes to properties in the Virgin Islands. And I know I had a discussion with Director Reimer in respect to what that would look like and what makes the most sense. And he said he had a conversation with you in terms of proposing a sliding scale instead of a, I call it the board, flat rate. I think that makes way more sense, and I think it's fair to our people here in the territory. As a matter of fact, if I have a little one bear with my piece of land that I'm not even using, and you have a mansion, you're paying the same as me, that don't make no sense in my opinion. Other places do it differently also, so I ask that you look at that, you look at that, and bring it in a way that will not kill those that are on a lower scale, but at the same time, be fair and equitable moving forward. What's your take on that? Because he said he had a discussion with you.

0:03:21 He did have discussions with me. 30 seconds. The fee that we're proposing is 50 cents a day, basically, \$180, which is cheaper than everywhere in the United States. So I think that's a fair and small amount to start with so that we can just get to break even so we can clean up these islands. Again, you owe \$25 million and a piece is filthy. I understand what you're saying. I'm a homeowner myself. I want to pay my fair share. But at the same time, you need to be, to look at the realistic picture of what's going on in your space. You're not killing anyone, like I say. A one, a five, a million dollar house compared to a hundred thousand dollar house, they should not be paying the same. Is that the bottom line? So you need to look at that and we will come again.

0:04:06 There's some states that do it based on a percentage. There's some places that do it based on the water and power bills. So there's different ways to look at it, for sure. Let's look at a way that will not basically impact people in a great way, but at the same time, assist the authority to be independent and self-sufficient and help to keep these islands clean. And lastly, before my time is called, I know you ordered a scale for a landfill in St. Thomas and St. John District. How much did you invest in that scale? I don't know the investment amount for that scale because it was bought before I came to the authority.

0:04:44 What has been done to put it into operation? We already pay for it and it's for a reason. I've contacted the company, Oasis, and they're actually sending somebody down to St. Thomas to install it. We got someone in St. Croix, we're fixing the scale there. And in St. John, we've moved the portable scale and brought it over there. So all three islands will have the scales. And I'm going to implement them at the new convenience centers that we're installing in St. Croix. What the time frame for the scale in St. Thomas? And what the time frame for the small garbage trucks that are going to be put in St. Thomas to assist with removing the bins from the corners slowly?

0:05:28 What the time frame? For the scale, I'm hoping that they can fix that within two months. So that's a two-month time frame. For the small garbage trucks, that's a longer-term approach. I'm going to just start off with two because I'm not at break-even yet. Which area? It's going to be some—I don't remember the exact name of the area, but it's going to be downtown Charlottesville, Mali, to start off. Okay, very well. Well, I'm going to stay on you because it's important. You have a lot of work to do. And as usual, I'll work with you to see what we can do to assure that what the plans are are implemented and executed. Thank you so much, Mr. Chair, for the time. And thank you again for your responses. Thank you very much, Senator Blighton. Before I go to the next senator, which will be Senator DeGraff, Director Griffith has really given thought to the opportunities that may be available for a private or even a public-private partnership in regards to this tire situation. I think that, you know, once again, you're biting off more than you can chew when you talk about hiring individuals, taking care of all of these tires on your own without—you know, you have a lot on your plate already when you talk about, you know, wastewater as well as solid waste. I think that this takes away from, you know, your focus there now to talk about hiring individuals, getting them clean, getting these things shipped out. There are opportunities and there are private vendors that pay taxes in this community. Again, to increase the tax rule that could provide that type of service for you here. You know, you know, we guesstimate that throughout this territory we have close to a million tires. 1.5. 1.5 tires. Now you're talking about hiring individuals to be able to take on that task and responsibility. I truly believe that, you know, when we looked at this, we saw where there may be some opportunities for, you know, private. So I'm asking that some consideration be given to that, even if there's a public-private partnership that you could enter into.

0:07:30 But I think that, again, you're drowning already and now you're taking on more water before you're actually able to start to save yourself. Well, honestly, we're looking at both. Tomorrow, I have a private company giving us a presentation and our team on what they can do with tires. Last week, we had another private company come to us and give us a presentation. They weren't financially ready to move forward. They needed almost 100% help from us to carry the load. So we're working, we're looking at all avenues because our goal is just to clean this island. And we don't care if it's done by us individually or if it's done by a private company. But we want to make sure that it's cost-effective so that we can sustain it for the long run. Too many programs have started and have ended in the territory. I remember there used to be a recycling program for aluminum cans in the territory. And as soon as the grant ended, that ended. So we have to put

things in place that we can keep on for perpetuity.

0:08:34 Well, again, I'm hoping that some consideration could be given for a private vendor to actually take on that task because I think this is... Definitely. It's already given. It's already being considered. Yes, sir. Okay. A point of information, Senator. Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon again, colleagues. Good afternoon to the testifiers. Director Griffith, is it possible? Have you researched the opportunities maybe when we ship these away, we could get some kind of investment return on it? Yeah, our engineer, one of our lead engineers are actually looking at that for us right now to see how we can break this down so that we can actually make money from it.

0:09:19 I'm interested to find out more about that. So we could talk offline about that. Yes, sir. Public-private thing? Public-private. Those opportunities are there. Senator, the graph you recognize for your four minutes. Thank you, Mr. Jay. Good afternoon, colleagues. Good afternoon, testifiers. All of you who are listening and present. Director Reimer, in regards to the environmental impact fee, that's now goes to the general fund, 100% of it, because at one point there was money used to pay back the 8%. So all of our funds goes to the general fund?

0:09:55 Yes. Okay. Yeah, and I remember that because we're trying to get some to pay to waste management. I agree with you what you state about having waste management be autonomous and doing what they're supposed to do. But the fact remains, in my nine years as a senator, we have had to find the monies to support this entity, because especially in paying vendors, we have paid millions of dollars to vendors. So in trying to get a funding source for them is basically the intent that I really understand and us trying to get going. I hear you. I support what you are saying. But the reality is we have to find the money. So, Senator, to respond to that, what we can do in this situation is you can sunset his portion of the 25%.

0:10:47 You keep the 25% that's going to be for the program, which is a youth program. And you sunset the other 25%, which pushes the waste management authority, of course, that we have the discussions about every time, to say, hey, raise rates. Get your rates in place. Raise revenue. Be more efficient. Be more · get to the point where you break even or even a live about break even that you clean it up. We're also even looking at structures for myself and the administration, looking at structures where can we go out and actually bond some · to clean up his payable and then give him a jump start by being able to fund his operation to a point where it is a sliding scale over seven years, that he's supposed to be in a position where he's 30% coming from the government and the rest coming from himself.

0:11:36 Okay, that's a suggestion that my colleague · that makes a little more sense along the line. Director Griffith, in the military, we have a saying called a police call. I do a police call outside my house every week, a couple of days a week, which is you walk up and down the hill, down the hill looking for garbage. And I pick it up and I throw it in the garbage properly. I caught the bush going up and down the hill.

0:12:05 Don't you have entities that ride around these islands? Before you answer, I am one of these residents of this territory, this beautiful territory. I ain't a tax · I ain't worried about being a taxpayer in all these. I'm a resident. The islands are filthy. You're here in a position · you got to have people that drive around and see. I could have tell you I had 1.5 million tires · so in other words, it's the frustration of the community because the fact of the matter that we are funding you, we being the people taxes funding you, is pure excuses to hear that the island is so filthy. One minute.

0:12:52 That we're doing this and we're doing that and we're doing the other. I live here all my life. The island is terrible. You live here. So you should be able to have teams that could ride around and say, "Hey, my son, this area got to clean up." Back of Windward Passage, filthy for years. I would have sued the government if I lived in Baghdad because I'm saying it's ridiculous. This water is there for years, way before your time, I understand, but you are that person in the seat, all the frustration is going to come to you. So I would like you to stop saying, "We're going to look into it, we're going to look into it." Show us something.

0:13:35 Well, we have been doing a lot and we can always point to issues, but all of this that's wrong is not going to get fixed in a year, in two years, in five years. I agree. I agree with you to report, this is going to take time. Every week I have the on sync where I had them going out to different locations cleaning up. And the amount of trash that's thrown in these areas, it's insanity. We went to clean the old Elena Christian School by Princess.

0:14:09 It took us about 10 bins to clean this thing up. And the same time we were cleaning up, our offices were there making sure everybody was safe and they stayed at night. And a truck came dumping stuff there the same day that we were cleaning it up. Prosecute him. Time. So of course, we gave them tickets. And when we give the tickets, the judges reduced the tickets too as well. So we're going to come to you guys too as well. We're working on amending that bill so that if you throw something litter that you don't go from a \$500 ticket to \$50, you have to show that, hey, this is not right. So we're doing that. And we know prudent replacement is happening. So those sewer lines are going to be replaced, but it's going to take a bunch of time because it's not an overnight process. But the staff at waste management is aggressively doing their job cleaning up. But it still comes down to money. I need more police officers to be able to hit these tire

companies that are illegally dumping at night all over the place. Because then I send my people out and we pick up the tires and we bring them to the landfill. So I'm telling them, hey, let's just have them bring them to the landfill then. Because I read it at the landfill than at a bush that we have to search and find for. So we are actively doing it, but it's not going to be an overnight process. For the next five years, no matter who sits at my desk, every time we come here, you're going to be able to find something that's wrong. Because that's how big the problem is. But every year, every month, every day we are working to improve that.

0:15:55 I know the bill is about the container fees and they support that. But in regards to waste management, you have an entity that addresses the public. Yes, we have a communication department. Use it a lot more, please. Let the public know what are you doing. Let people know. When you clean up an area, it gets dumped on again. Make noise. You have to do it. And we have to raise our volume. You're 100% correct with that. Midland Road, we've cleaned that on many occasions. And then when I drive up Midland Road at the first bridge that you hit, somebody is dumping trash right there when there is a bin site that's not even half a mile away. I'm like, what in the world are they doing? Why would you do that? So I'm calling, so let me get off my soap box.

0:16:43 Thank you, Senator. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Appreciate it. Thank you very much, Senator DeGroff. Any burning questions for my colleagues? Director Griffith, in respect to the sewage disposal, have you done an assessment of creating a fee or some type of a charge for those individuals that are utilizing the current site for free? Sewage disposal, those-- You know, right now, everyone that's connected that's within 60 feet of our sew lines gets charged up \$110.

0:17:15 No, no, no, that's not what I'm referring to. Those disposals that comes to the Anguilla landfill? Oh, those disposals, yes. Our fee was passed a very long time ago for about \$75. And I don't know why it was never implemented. It started and stopped. So I have instructed the team to start that back up again. We've created the new flyers, and we're meeting this month with the companies that pump the septs. Those are the things that, again, director Julia keeps talking about. I mean, we need to make sure that we're doing our own in terms of building your revenues to be able to have self-sufficiency, because those individuals charge significant amount of money to come and collect those, but then they come to Anguilla and dump it for free.

0:18:04 All right, that's ending this month. Yeah. All right. At this time, we'll come to the, well, before I go there, back street, behind of the library, Edith Ball Library. In St. Croix or St. Thomas? Edith Ball Library. Oh, St. Thomas, okay. I know not. Yeah, there is a sewage issue behind there as well that's really developing. Again, I got texts in respect to that that is creating some impediments behind of the Virgilio's, the library, that whole section behind. Okay. We'll jump on that now.

0:18:46 Senator Bulkas, bill sponsor, you're recognized for your four minutes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Colleagues, inflation and trade activity and operational costs have actually grown significantly, and they impact our environment and our economy. And, you know, as it is, you know, those are at stake. And as we continue to build momentum when we talk about our recovery efforts and the long-term economic revitalization of the Virgin Islands, we have to be proactive and forecast for the influx of materials, containers filled with building materials or more food. And, again, I'll mention it on the record. I would venture to say that 100% or 90-something percent of whatever comes in here is going to fall on waste management's doorstep. And, you know, we want to be responsible. And I thank the OMB director, IRB, for providing data and information as we look to try to modernize the levels of what we're discussing here today concerning the container tax. And while also addressing a very important gap, for the first time, we're now going to establish a fee for the 45-foot flat rack containers. Historically, they've entered our ports without fully contributing to the territory's revenue base and have impacted our infrastructure way more severely than a 20-foot or a 40-foot because of the sheer fact of what they're bringing in. So now we're able to tap into that new revenue base, and we're going to be able to have them pay their fair share when it comes to that. And these flat rack containers, they're the backbone of construction and heavy equipment and industrial importation. You know, but I wanted to ask a couple questions. There was an indication surrounding having a 25%, under 25% for operations for waste management for it having a sunset. Director, what are your thoughts around that? Which one? I apologize. Waste management. Griffith.

0:20:54 I always want money for perpetuity, so I'm always against that, but I can understand the logic behind it, and I wouldn't have a problem if you put one like five years or seven years for us because we are aggressively working to get off of the general fund so that we can start collecting our own fees. Okay, that's nice to hear because, you know, to the OMB director's concern, Director Reimer, he indicated that, you know, he was just a little leery surrounding what if the number of containers come down, which I don't see it coming down because of the sheer fact of how the recovery is going. But at some given point, yes.

0:21:32 My only fear with the sunset, though, is that, for example, the tire fees that you guys passed had a sunset, and we've received zero of those dollars so far. Well, if there's one thing that I got out of this hearing so far is that when somebody tells you something, you repeat it on the record several times, and you mentioned that the director mentioned that you're

going to get that \$1.8 million. So I'm looking forward to that for next week. Okay, great, great, great. I'm sure he's a man of his word. He'll take care of it. He is. Yes. So, you know, we'll discuss that. I'll discuss it with my colleagues, but I'm glad that you threw the number out. Maybe it could be 10 years, you know, which aligns sort of like with the recovery, and then we can hopefully look at how we're going to get that \$75 that the director would like. One minute. And, of course, retaining that 25% in perpetuity for the youth program, which is a very important component. And regarding that, Director Griffith, and I appreciate even your personal experience with the Anti-Litter Beautification Summer Program, I also happen to be one of those individuals. And it helped me to become who I am when it concerns the waste management and being vigilant about trash and not littering and so forth. But can you please tell me if this bill were to pass, because there is a 60-day window before it's implemented, and I know it's going to be quite some time before you see the funds.

0:22:54 But, I mean, let's just say a year from now, would you be prepared to institute that program? Yes. Would the waste management authority have everything in place, rules, regulations, application process, and be ready to implement that program for our children? Yes, sir. 30 seconds. Okay, excellent. That's what I wanted to hear. And before my time expires, I just want to thank both of you, along with Director Lee, who also collaborated, and we all spoke about this bill off and on several times throughout the process. I thank you for your input and suggestions as well, and, of course, the deliberations today. Thank you, colleagues. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much, Senator Volquez. And our next discussion will be streetlights. Funding streetlights. At this time, we'll take a three-minute recess to discuss the measure before us. The Committee of Budget, Appropriations, and Finance stands in recess for three minutes.

0:23:55 We'll be right back. Thank you. [2 such phrases repeated 13 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

0:26:31 Thank you. Thank you.

0:27:31 Thank you. Thank you.

0:28:31 Thank you. [1 such phrases repeated 9 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

0:33:01 Thank you. Thank you.

0:34:01 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

0:36:31 Thank you. Thank you.

0:37:31 Thank you. Thank you.

0:38:31 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you for bringing this bill.

0:40:31 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

0:42:01 Thank you.

People named in this transcript

SUSPECTED, and a finding aid only. Names were matched by machine against the spellings used across all 426 of our transcripts, and the title is the one used in the room. Being named here is NOT evidence that a person attended or spoke · only that the name was said. Speech recognition mishears names, so a spelling may be wrong even where no alternative is offered.

- 3x **Senator Dwayne DeGraff**
heard in this transcript as: DeGraff, DeGroff
- 2x **Senator Angel L. Bolques, Jr.**
heard in this transcript as: Angel L. Bolques Jr., Volquez
- 2x **Senator Angel L. Bulkes Jr**
heard in this transcript as: Bulkas
- 2x **Senator Marvin A. Blighton**
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