



04/24/2026 The Committee on Disaster Recovery, Infrastructure and Planning

Legislature USVI

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0:00:00 they coming to build something with the same inspector and we have to come out to do the inspection for days so when the work that we waiting on for 2035 all these years that I seen these papers pushing back a year pushing back two years pushing back three years because they're trying to make sure they grab everything he's a businessman I can't get money in the world we can't allow people to come here to believe they could get all the money out of the way they need to make them they are not you they need to make the effort to reach out to these individuals and others so when when the construction is over they pack all the garbage up and go about a business who really come to stay if you bring 5,000 man here maybe 500 might make this day home the other 4500 going back up the road and if you leave island building here we're gonna have the same we have derelict in our towns and then derelict all over the island that's my position I tell you so I think I need to really take our time and make sure these man start to produce what the housing will look like because if we don't do that we line out in some serious problem and one thing we will end up losing I mean this administration may be at the end of these and the end of this storm I'm just saying change of government slows down again I don't care who the changes I just saying looking forward for wait is we got to make sure we stay focused and the focus gonna be making sure the contractors are no already having a place to learn easy individual to work and leave I don't mind you buy two or three billion but all this extra billion billion in a work for us I tell you I tell me I could see the future and if

0:01:53 the future is telling me that A ain't gonna be good thank you oh no okay I I hold on Senator Joseph I need to Senator Joseph I I am optimistic I am optimistic um go ahead go ahead um I feel like I need to clear the record because we the building building that is not what is being stated there is a company that wants to build the type of structure that's collapsible after the time is completed and that service can be provided to all of the contractors there may be a need for rezoning wherever the location but yes that has that is the option that is presented to have a universal option for the contractors this does not preclude them from there's one who was interested in purchasing the hotel on St. Thomas does

not preclude them from utilizing the existing resource one thing that we need to understand is that they prefer to utilize the existing resources and then after that if that is not sufficient then they will go out because it's easier to work with what's already here once that is done then of course there's an opportunity and there's still a need and their contract can support it then we will review and make sure that we have some input in what's being done they usually come to us beforehand and say this is what we want to do is there a problem you know what are your thoughts on doing this is this an allowable expense so I don't want us to walk away today with a feel like we're just everybody's going to do any and any old thing here in the what's going to do is that we want to do any of our partners on the Virgin Islands the contractors are they communicate they ask questions and we provide the super PMO team they provide we provide guidance to them and this is really just coming from me as a crucial and more so than a senator when you look back on the last seven years what do you think was the greatest source of delays or cause I should say cause of delays delays um in the last seven years because you've had this position for the last seven years and there's only there's only one um one one I I know I know that one project one project right that's the Arthur Richards but when you look so when you look back on the last seven years for you and I keep saying this we need to do you look back lessons learned you know we don't know with this election coming up what's going to happen I don't know some people said it could see the future I can't but you know everything may change and it may be an entire start over again that's my biggest concern right so going like if I

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when I look at your testimony and when I look at your testimony and you spoke about specifically how things have changed and you mentioned the tariffs well the tariffs only came into play when President Trump was elected and he was elected he became president in 2025 but we began we began this in 2019 so we can't continue to to every time you appear in front of us something something will happen something will happen something in this world will happen we may be heaven forbid in a world war something will happen so do you understand what I'm what I'm concerned about sure senator I mean so when I when we come to these these hearings and we've been doing this for a long time and I we feel like we say the same thing over and over again because but then I realized that we have to keep saying it because when we first started we didn't have any money the biggest impediment was to get the funds and the second impediment was the cash share we didn't have the cash share we didn't get this cash share until we conversations began in 2024 where we fully had the money to be able to start the projects and then we started to get obligations we didn't have the money and we have a chart that we put in our testimony that shows how many months how much money we had at the time we got the monies final money started for the schools in 2024 we went out and we started to recruit contractors to come in through from 2025 and in 2025 and in 2025 I testified before this body that we are moving forward to rebuild usvi because our mission is to put all these these schools and all these facilities critical facilities under contract in 2025 and we begin in 2026 we expect to start construction on these projects and 2027 we are going to see the increase in construction and we're going to peak in 2028 that has been the projection and that has been my testimony every time I come before this this this committee so the challenges we feel the need to outline so we can let the people know who's coming next who knows but understand the path that we have traveled to get to the point where we are today it is not an easy task and the costs are rising and my greatest concern is inflation and the the fact that FEMA has been shut down for several months and we have not been able to get a lot of things approved those are the risks and the challenges that we deal with on a day-to-day basis that have us here author riches was able to be built because we took the asset recovery money and we stepped out on faith and started that project but that money was limited we could only do it with that school if we had more money we they the the line of credit that allowed us here for the the the the the the governor requested the senate approved is what has helped us to keep a lot of these projects but we have we have learned lessons over the years to get us to this point where all of the projects save three as a contractor and a schedule and that's moving forward and we apologize that we couldn't get it done earlier but that's the hand and that's the

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the cards that we were dealt thank you senator avery lewis you recognize for your five minutes thank you um good afternoon colleagues good afternoon to the testifiers afternoon good afternoon to the people of the virgin islands you know just to be joining in on the conversation just to be quite honest i think a lot of some of the problem came in is that when this administration started out in 2019 2020 wrong there so when the good governor would come on and his press conference he would say we have a lot of money we have money money knocking dog and tell me people don't go for the money we have money and the people then think that you know the fed just cash us a check sent us a check and we slip it in our account and you know when miss actor williams actor in get the contractors in place we could run and say hey begin never knowing that there was a 17 to 20 step 19 to 20 step process that you have to go through because nobody really came out and said these are the different tears of um bureaucracy for lack of better words that we have to go through and we have to go through the testimony i want to go through the testimony i want to focus on page 4 of your testimony this afternoon you said that you kept a job as of april 23rd 2026 the construction sector reports 40 job vacancies from 12 employers actively recruiting candidates and you expounded on your views program i just want to say this within the last two months i've been to three groundbreaking. Two schools in St. Thomas, one in St. Croix. And I

know this one particular contractor, and I ain't calling no name, don't need more people. Where is this source coming from? Senator, the source is going to come from our pipeline. It's going to come from the graduating students that are graduating from 12th grade, it's going to come from the local residents, and it's going to come from 49 hours abroad, or any of the labor force that comes in with any of these companies. That's the source. But I still think we're short.

0:11:59 We are short. And Director Ocklanden is quoting that study. That study was done in 2018, 2019, the study was done in 2019, the RAND study, and it said that that was based on a population of when we had over 100,000. And so the numbers of what we're looking at, we have been working with the U.S. Department of Labor and a foreign labor certification process because we do have a local foreign certification program. And we were looking for between 5,000 to 7,000, and we were on track before the administration change to be able to have a source of 4,000 possible workers that could be a part of a pool that these contractors could have pulled from once they clearly identified that there's no local can occupy those jobs. And so, but that source has dried up because we have no more access to the H-2B visa process. So, Ms. Williams, Dr. Lynn, good afternoon.

0:13:07 Good afternoon. Based on what you're seeing, and let's be realistic now. This summer, how many school projects we have going on? We expect to have five of them going on. One, two, three, four. Four, four? Five. Five. Five, right? And one contractor have all five? One minute. No. We have J. Benton, consigli Benton and MCN Build, and we have Gladys Abraham and St. Thomas is being done by custom builders.

0:13:46 Okay. So once all your funding and thing is in place and checks cut and correct and thing, do they have the sufficient manpower to finish these jobs? They have the manpower to start. They have the manpower to start. You know, what the struggle here is to make sure that the RAN study said every able-bodied worker, we need to make sure that they utilize every able-bodied worker, because after that they must find people elsewhere because of skill requirements, specialized expertise, that has to come from the outside. But we want to make sure that they utilize everything here first, before they have to bring anyone in. Good. And my last, Ty McCall? Let's let me wrap up with this. Ty McCall?

0:14:37 Ty McCall? You know, I just want to say this here real quick, and this is to you, Commissioner Malloy. We have some entities here that this government have given some good monies to. You know, for whoever the city training children and different things and developing workforce. Have we reached back out to those entities to see how they link them to what we're trying to achieve, to see what they're producing? You know, to develop the workforce, like my brother's workshop and so forth. I don't really want to call no name on my brother's workshop. I mean, like, have we tell them, well, hey, we're trying to produce this, this is what Jibenta needs, we need electricians, we need plumbers, we need whatever. How many you could produce? And then, you know, because I really don't know how did they recruit?

0:15:29 And I'm just asking you, like, how are we developing the workforce? Well, I thank you for that question. And I'll tell you, my brother's workshop is very special to us. I know, yes. We've had a challenge in trying to get them to be an eligible training provider and they have done, because they're doing great work, but again, they were doing great work, but they don't want to do the paperwork on the federal side. So, they have done, they continue to do great work, when they produce their individuals, they're getting the national certifications, those individuals are going to come and be registered in our view system, and they're going to be a part of the 40, the vacancies, or a part of the 114 individuals that are interested in those vacancies that we have. And again, nothing against my brother's workshop, I've seen what they have done. I've seen the great works they've done, woodworking, electrical, culinary arts, I've seen the great work. I'm just saying, how are we tapping into them more?

0:16:34 They're getting the national certifications. Because we have a workforce, the gentleman looking to bring two bags, tie them together, and how much do you say? About 500 people you want, and those are people coming in, they're going to replace our people. So, I'm just trying to secure our people, because, you know, when Ms. Williams actually didn't rebuild the whole Virgin Islands, we're going to need people to work in these buildings as well. I agree. And if Senator, to page four, of the 712 active job seekers right now, there's only 114 that's interested in the construction field. Only 114 of the 712 that we have right now in the system, as of yesterday, that are interested in the construction field. And so those individuals are coming from the different sources. Because once they get the national certification and everything else, the view system is going to do the job matching, and we're going to get a pool of candidates to make a recommendation, and then the employers are going to have their choice from those individuals.

0:17:35 But in order to we have to expand the pool. It starts with the interest, and it starts with making sure individuals are in our system. The employers have to post their vacancies, many of them. The reason why you're not seeing more of a construction footprint is because they're not at the stage yet where they're ready to be able to identify the positions to post. That's a free system for employers? It's a free system for employers, yes. Okay, thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair.

- 0:18:05 Thank you, Senator Lewis. Regarding the InVision program, where do the funds for the InVision program come from, and how much funds did that program have? And to date, how much have you expended? The finance person just got up and left, that's what it is? Yes. She has to catch her flight. Yeah. But the Housing Finance Authority manages the actual funding, so we manage the program, and then we send the payments to be reimbursed from Housing Finance Authority. We, I'll have to get you, I don't know the, we don't have the overarching, like, budget that's managed by HFA. We just, we manage the amount of payments and draws that we draw down, and I can get the overall amount to date in a second without holding you up.
- 0:19:09 But then how do you, like if I have 10 houses left, but HFA says that you only have \$10. I mean, you know what I'm saying? In terms of planning, and what the extent of work and the scope of work for each one of those homes that need to be repaired, HFA, it's not unlimited. No, it's not. That's what I'm saying. So it's finite, and so you would need to know what you have left and what you intend to, how you intend to use whatever it is you have left. Right, so we have project costs, project budget costs, so we, we manage it from there.
- 0:19:53 Um, and I'll get the total amount of the budget costs, but we have a cap per home right now at \$400,000 per home. So when we put the house out to bid, and we have our independent estimate, and we see what the cost comes in. So we manage it from the overall cost of the contract for that particular home. If by any chance we have to go over the \$400,000, then there's a lot of justification, a special case panel, and special authorizations to go over that \$400,000 cap. Who makes the decision if you have to go over the Housing Finance Authority? The, the cost comes in, we put the house out to bid. Yeah.
- 0:20:38 And when it comes in, we see what the bids are, and then we will have a special case panel to approve whether or not this is actually allowable, and all the justification that goes in there. It will then have to go to the, it's the ODR's contract, so it has to go to the Board of Directors, our Board of Directors. And then we also stay in conjunction with Housing Finance Authority from a compliance perspective, that they will, you know, agree that this is a path that we approve to take. \$400,000 per house. For house, yes. For house. Per house. We are getting, that's the cap. That's the cap.
- 0:21:19 And we have, um, we've been getting, this last solicitation we put out, we've been getting \$500,000. We have a house that's over \$600,000. That's a bill of house from, from, from the grown up? Not even that. Sometimes it's to demolish an existing home. Um, sometimes it is, it's somebody's larger home that they built, and now they need it, it was damaged severely. Um, so it's not the typical \$1,500 square foot. Right, right. So maybe a \$2,000 square foot home, and the cost to repair those are, like, really high.
- 0:21:55 \$600,000. We got a house, a cost of \$600,000 plus in St. John. Well, and they --

People named in this transcript

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- 3x **Senator Carla Joseph**
the surname alone also matches: Clifford Joseph; Karla J. Joseph
heard in this transcript as: Joseph
- 2x **Senator Avery Lewis**
heard in this transcript as: Lewis
- 2x **Commissioner Gary Malloy**
the surname alone also matches: Ruben Malloy
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