



| Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance

Legislature USVI

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- 0:00:00 pilots, passengers, emergency evacuations if needed, and normally right now we talk with the day-to-day staff at Meyer Keating, but I have not been in contact with any higher-ups or chiefs of staff for Schneider Medical Region or Meyer Keating. And are you currently doing airlift from the BVI to Meyer Keating? No. So BVI, the MOU that we have for them are for their outer islands, say Anagata, Virgin Gorda, the North Sound area, Peter Island, Guana Island. If they have an emergency they can give us a call and then we usually take them to Rhode Island. Yeah, Rhode Town, exactly. So we do have on occasion where people do call us, for example, from saying we need to take them to the de-pressurization chamber, I'm blanking on the name, and bring them here to St. Thomas. So we do get calls from St. Croix because helicopters can fly low to do that and we do land directly at the pad here at Schneider. We have done a couple of medical evacuations from Meyer Keating to Schneider, where someone has dislocated something.
- 0:01:15 So there have been instances where we have done BVI to St. Thomas, that holds in itself a whole other set of hoops to jump through in regard with U.S. CBP and clearance into and out of the territory. So very rarely does that happen directly. But we can do it with the prior approvals and we seek to aid where we can as quickly as we can. Very well. Thank you. Thank you for that. This time we'll recognize Senator Hibbert-Frederick. You'll recognize for your three minutes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon again. Listening and viewing audience, colleagues, testifiers and my awesome stuff. Let me start off with Assistant Commissioner Vincent Richards. Assistant Commissioner, when we last spoke in reference to some of the environmental concerns, noises and other factors, when we talked about having these equipment mounted on the tower and the impact on the adjacent community. I know you were supposed to get back with us. Where this location is located, is it identical to the one that we spoke about before?
- 0:02:35 Vincent Richards for Property and Becoming. Yes, Senator, it is the identical property. Okay. So then we've already addressed those issues and we'll just wait to get some feedback on what you found out. Because then it's the same situation we're dealing with, right? We're still going to have people calling in if there is a problem or not. About radiation

or any suspected medical or health impact. Senator, if I may? Please.

0:03:08 If the photographs that we supplied, we supplied two photographs. Yeah. One of them will show you that there's basically three communication towers in that general area. And some are commercial and some are government. The one that I'm showing you is government communication equipment. Good job.

0:03:36 Let me roll to Mr. Otley. I want to thank you for your service, sir. I know your voice before I actually knew you. Okay. And I thank you so much. I grew up hearing the voice and you guys have helped me out when storms were coming and just in general. I enjoy radio. I had a radio show for almost 10 years. So, I think this is important. The redundancy that you showed us on the video. One minute.

0:04:05 I really appreciate that. I think that's going to really help us to stay on air longer. The only problem is your generator only holds fuel for 45 days, you said? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Well, WAPA was out for three months the last time. No, no. Well, you see, we have, we have two generators and we have, uh, I'm just messing with you. Okay. So, but we really appreciate now that we have, have the hardened structures we spoke about, you know, developing more resiliency in our communication for emergency management. So thank you very much, Ms. Van Hurt. My issue is, your company is currently set up for, is it tourism? Tourist traffic or? It's mainly transportation, correct.

0:04:51 For tourists? For tourists and locals alike. Okay. So, in the testimony, it talked, the bill talks about medical usage and I just found out that you have no agreement with the hospitals. So this is just something you hope to do? You were just putting it in the bill? It's something that we already do, but we don't have agreements. We get calls at 3:00 a.m. and someone says, hey, the car rolled over the side, my boat flipped over, the hospital boat is four hours out. When can you be here? I can be there in 45 minutes. Awesome. Well, we do the best we can with what we have. We aim to serve the community. I and my family want to help. And we do so. If we can get an agreement and work towards an agreement, we're open for it. Absolutely.

0:05:42 Mr. Chair, thank you very much. Appreciate the time. Thank you very much, Senator Frederick. Next, we'll recognize Senator DeGraff. You'll recognize for your three minutes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon, colleague. Good afternoon, testifier. I'm Ms. Vanderhert. Again, my condolences to you, your family. What I didn't understand was it's a government helipad and the government is trying to give you a lease to operate a helicopter service. And we don't even have any kind of memorandum of understanding with the hospital itself. So we don't have an MOU with the hospital itself. Now, we've been trying for a long time working with government officials to find an appropriate landing space to offer services to the community of St. John for transportation.

0:06:38 The park holds most of that. So there are very limited slots available to offer not only emergency evacuation, but transportation to and from the island of St. John, which is also part of my testimony that St. John is one of the only major commercial islands in the Caribbean that does not have airlift capacity. So we're trying to make that happen. Excuse me. Okay, good. So I get that. But I can't agree with giving you a 20 year lease for government property. There's no MOU with a government entity to do what you choose to do, because then you still run a commercial business. And when I hear where property procurement is concerned about WSDA reselling or leasing property, to an entity who has saved people through hurricanes for donkey years and to give them a hard time, it don't add up to me. So again, no disrespect toward you or your business. Your business is needed on St. John. It's needed in the territory. I applaud you for that. Continue the great work. But this is a government property.

0:07:48 I don't understand how property procurement is given a lease to a private entity at a St. John hospital. What we're trying to get a hospital back on for the people of St. John. So they will need to be flown over to even though it's a clinic. It seems something backwards. I'm missing something. One minute. So for me, I can't support you. If you had an agreement with the hospital to provide those services, that's an agreement. But to give you a lease for government property at a clinic, I really don't agree with that. I think it is bad business. That's one.

0:08:26 Now, for WSDA, number one, you need to tear up the lease you have and ask them to renegotiate the lease. Seconds. Thirty thousand dollars a year. You gotta be insane. So I don't think we should move this lease forward. We should hold it in committee, ask them to renegotiate the lease, and we go through the issues. The issue that the government mentioned in regards to maybe resale or taking over, that's good. But they could put it in the lease. That if that comes on, and you have your son right behind you, your young generation, another generation of the athletes ready to take over, you know. So again, I don't support your lease as it stands. I support them reducing the amount of money you gotta pay, number one, because of the services WSDA provided for the territory. Time. Time. In signs of disaster. If I may wrap up, Mr. Chair. In signs of disaster. So if you hear me voting over it, because I don't support them, what they charge you, \$2,500 a month, I don't agree with it. That's one. And the NOAA issue, the NOAA issue was the picture that they showed looked at the tower. I've been to the area. The area is a residential area. That housing finance authority is selling property. And the

persons who have to purchase these properties have to sign a waiver.

- 0:09:53 That, hey, we don't know what might happen to you because of this tower being here. That's why we didn't vote for it before. Not because of what NOAA brings. I applaud what NOAA brings for the territory in terms of the services provided for the entire region. But it's right smack that in a housing residential area where residents have to sign off a lease stating, hey, we're not responsible if something happened to you. Thank you for the time, Mr. Chair.
- 0:10:22 Thank you very much, Senator DeGraff. Next, we'll recognize Senator Fonseca. You'll recognize for your three minutes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to follow up quickly on what my colleague from Savan was talking about the tower, the NOAA. And so the question is, it says it's, they're going to use it for reception of weather and emergency data. So this tower is going to be collecting weather information. Am I correct? Yes, no?
- 0:11:02 There's a question for me, Senator? Yes, yes, Vincent, that's, I can't-- Good afternoon, good afternoon, Senator. Yes, okay. Yes, the, it collects atmospheric data. Okay, so you know we have a bill in the legislature here, in the committee of government operations, et cetera, to be collecting weather data. And this is so interesting that NOAA is actually going to be doing it. So is it going to be possible for VITEMA to obtain that data firsthand? Or VITEMA, this is privileged information they're going to be collecting that VITEMA cannot get. Can you explain, can VITEMA get that weather data that they're collecting in the territory? Senator, good question, but to be honest, I am not a subject matter expert. I would, I would, I would, I would assume that all those notifications we get over our telephones whenever the weather changes, that it comes from data collected at sites just like this.
- 0:12:04 So when the, when the, before you go out on your boat, and you want to know whether there's gonna, you know, where the wind is coming from, what the ocean is doing. Excuse me, I gotta interrupt you. These sites are where the data comes from, Senator. Excuse me, excuse me, Vince. You assume, so I understand that you assume, so you don't know for sure. But I need, before I can support this, I need to know for sure that this data that's going to be collected here on St. Thomas can be utilized and accessed directly by VITEMA. I don't want no hair collecting data and we're not getting it. Quickly, I wanted to go to the St. John helipad. So, do you know the trip, if it's three o'clock in the morning and say I want to go to have a party in St. John, how much would it be to get the helicopter?
- 0:12:53 Because you mentioned you can do it as the trip. I would say that we would not do that. So, it is a residential area. The point of putting the lights at the helipad are not for our commercial business. We run a daylight only at 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. right now is what we run commercially for tourism and charter and for residents of the VI. If someone calls me in the middle of the night for one of those, I say please call me tomorrow. I will hang up on them. Okay. So, in other words, the rich folks can't call for a helicopter three in the morning to go to St. John.
- 0:13:31 No, absolutely not. Okay. That's not the point of us working on the helipad. The point of us working on the helipad is to provide more of a service to the residents. Okay. Absolutely. I do want to point out that we don't provide services at night and we will continue to not provide services at night. It's just something that we don't want to do. Okay. Thank you. Also, you know, Mr. Hartley, you know, listening to legit TV a few minutes ago, you were thinking it's WSDA radio. You know, the voice that comes over and WSDA radio, you know, legit TV.
- 0:14:06 You know, I had to say, wow, you know, that's awesome. You know, I too support the discussion that I was here having a little discussion with the Senate president. I was surprised that it's \$2,500 a month for WSDA. I think personally, that's a little bit high. Well, actually, if I could share. Yes. The regular rent is actually \$1,098 or something like that. So this is a substantial increase.
- 0:14:36 Over 150% yes. Okay. And that was my protest. Again, and I said, it's not that we can't do it, but I say if you do it, push it back six years. Give us some time. Because again, we're still going through a transition. Time. And we ran into a whopper \$90,000 bill, a property and procurement \$40,000 bill that we have already paid off. And we did a payment plan for \$2,500 that was completed in December, and the rent went back to the regular rate of \$1,000 and change. But in the disagreement, they insist that's what they want.
- 0:15:28 Yeah. Well, Mr. Chair, just to wrap up, you know, I think that's high for WSDA, especially the community service that you do for this community. Well, I just think Thomas is the whole version now, and sometimes even the BVI, you're the one on the radio. So, you know, I'm a little concerned because I see leases coming before here for peanuts, and now you have WSDA's \$2,500 a month. I think that's a little bit high. Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the time. Thank you very much, Senator Fonseca. Point of information. Senator De Graff, you recognize. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Ma'am, your last name again, please?
- 0:16:09 Charlotte Van Herc. Okay, Ms. Van Herc. If, God forbid, your helicopter just skid off the helipad, and someone gets injured, who has the liability? We have full insurance. That's the \$1 million. Okay, but I'm saying, so without you having a lease, then also, Myra Keaton, the government can be sued? I'm sorry, restate? You have a \$1 million insurance, but in

addition, then, without you having a lease, then also, Myra Keaton, the government can be sued? I'm sorry, restate? You have a \$1 million insurance, but in addition, then, without you having a lease? Without you having a lease, then the government also can be sued for the clinic and for the hospital?

0:16:45 That's, from what I understand, that would be outside my purview, what happens at the clinic is for the clinic, right? What happens, we have the insurance for the helicopter, and then we have the insurance for the lease. Right, but if you slide off the helipad, and someone gets injured, in addition to your- That insurance would cover it all. Okay, all right. Thank you. Thank you for the time, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much, Senator DeGraff. Point of inquiry, Senator Vielle. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

0:17:12 Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Going back to the lease appeal productions, this section 102 A, annual rent if assigned or transferred. I have had the opportunity to be able to vote on so many leases, and I have never seen a clause. Never seen a clause. It's like it just created, you believe that they're going to sell us, and why is a clause in there, and it's not for any other entity, if you assign a transfer?

0:17:48 So you're telling me, if a local group's supposed to buy PO production, they got to pay triple because a local- I don't believe that should be in there, colleagues. I just, it's very strange to see that clause in there when it has not been used before. I have never seen it. What is it about this group that you decide that you need to put that in? To protect what? I wish you could put the same protection for all the lease agreements that come here. When we ask for protections, property and procurement, oh, we can't do this. Oh, we can't do that. Oh, we can't do this. But now all of a sudden, they're the greatest protection. Make sure that we don't allow this company to do anything so we're going to put in this clause. But why don't we say, well, let me make a little change to the 99-year lease?

0:18:35 Well, you can't do it. Don't touch it. Can't work \$100 a month. Don't touch it. But now they want \$90,000 if they're signing a transfer to a radio station. They're begging for agreement with Vitima to provide information to the people at the Virgin Islands, and specifically the people at St. Damas. We've got to be, what's going on with us? By allowing them to take our own homegrown radio station and have them with a gun to the head that if they are signing a transfer, you're going to triple it.

0:19:10 Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much, Senator Bailey. What's the value of that FEMA investment at the radio station? What's the value? Say that. What's the dollar value of the investment from FEMA at that radio station with all that equipment and everything else that's there? I'll have to request that from FEMA because, again, we're just -- It has to be significant. I mean, obviously, there's a lot of equipment in there, and, you know, you have two generators, you know, these 5,000-gallon tanks, a lot of equipment, transmitters, all kind of things.

0:19:45 It has to be a worthwhile investment for them to put out there. Is there anything else like that at any other station in the Virgin Islands? Say that again? Is there any other location that FEMA has their emergency service? No, I think they have selected WSTA on St. Thomas, and the next one, I guess, would be in Puerto Rico. They have stations in Puerto Rico. So you actually covered -- We represent the Virgin Islands. You actually covered the Virgin Islands. Yeah. That's what I thought.

0:20:17 Yeah. Senator Potter, you're recognized for your three minutes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to piggyback off of the previous speaker regarding the \$90,000 tripling of the annual rent to \$90,000 upon assignment. And I just -- I mean, I just want to kind of get the rationale from Mr. Richards regarding why this figure or how this figure was ascertained. I mean, I mean, is this rate -- are you saying this rate is competitive enough to prevent transfers, to avoid higher payments? Can you sort of just kind of help me with the rationale behind the \$90,000 upon assignment? Vincent Richards for the Department of Property and Becurement.

0:21:10 Senator, I believe we went back and forth with this organization for quite some time. I have been involved with supporting this organization, supporting this lessee for the past nine years, the Department of Property and Becurement. The Department of Property and Becurement under previous administration has abated tens of thousands of dollars from the rent for goodwill, from balances on this organization. The Department of Property and Becurement has entered into swaps and trades to reduce their obligation to the Government of the Virgin Islands.

0:21:52 The Government of the Virgin Islands has -- and the Federal Government through VITEMA -- has invested significant tens of thousands of dollars into this facility. The Government of the Virgin Islands had a lease agreement with a structure or a rate that dates back to the 1980s.

People named in this transcript

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- 5x **Senator Dwayne DeGraff**
heard in this transcript as: De Graff, DeGraff
- 3x **Senator Ray Fonseca**
heard in this transcript as: Fonseca
- 2x **Senator Hubert Frederick**
heard in this transcript as: Frederick
- 2x **Senator Milton E. Potter**
heard in this transcript as: Potter