



## Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance

Legislature USVI

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- 0:00:00 Are the funds still going through the Department of Education for the Bureau of Construction and Maintenance? So the Bureau has its own budget on the local side. They are managing some of our ARPA projects, which were recently granted permission to move forward. So about \$30 million of those ARPA funding are for maintenance-related projects. So you're still signing off on some of the... So how soon before is a complete transition where they know... So to be quite honest, Senator, the U.S. Department of Education does not recognize the Bureau.
- 0:00:41 That's a local legislation. So any funding that is granted to the territory will be given to the Department of Education as the grantee. And then we would have to make arrangements internally to facilitate any projects, etc. Okay, so I want to ask you real quickly about the nurses. I was looking at the pay for the nurses. It's a little low compared to the other nurses. What is a separate contract? You have your nurses, a separate contract. And how are you going to fix that? Because what you're paying the nurses as opposed to what the other nurses make, seems like you'd have a retention problem.
- 0:01:24 We do, but we do, but we cannot fix or go aside from what is in the collective bargaining agreement. So that's a separate contract from the other? Yes. Okay, so does that contract expire in September? Is that the nurses' contract that expires in September of this year, or that's another one? Well, they're part of the American Federation of Teachers, and we're in negotiations as we speak. Okay, good, good, good, okay, so now I want to go to page, well, first of all, you made a comment that the OMB director, when the chairman asks you about the third-party fiduciary, that they are pushing to get out of the third-party fiduciary. Is that going to happen, and what's the timelines for that?
- 0:02:09 So I don't have any timelines, Senator, but I had the opportunity to meet with the Secretary of Education, McMahon, and at that meeting, she did indicate that the U.S. Department of Education now wants to move all of the jurisdiction of federal funding to the states. So that means that OMB has to create an arm that would manage the money. In addition, she mentioned that the third-party was a level of bureaucracy that this administration was trying to get out of.

- 0:02:43 So that is a conversation that is happening on the governor's level and with the director of OMB, and once that's in place, I think we will be able to transition, but timelines I don't have. Okay, good, I like that, because, you know, that's the exact same testimony the director of OMB gave us, so I like when there's a lot of consistency here. Okay, okay, on page 13, you said as far as the students. 30 seconds. It was 10,312 students, no, 10,400 and something students, and your average is about 5,000 in each district, so they're more or less balanced. Lockhart Elementary School, where is their playground? I mean, it's not an elementary anymore.
- 0:03:33 They have up to eighth grade. Where is their playground? They don't have a playground. They don't have a playground, Senator. Yeah, they don't have a playground. So when are we going to be able to fix that? Because, you know, kids from first grade through eighth grades, they want to run around. Time. Time. So when the Charlotte Amaya is finished, we're going to have the playground back, or how do we-- So, of course, all of the modernizations and the new bills will have the amenities, which include playgrounds. Okay. But until then, I am not sure where funding would come from to put a playground there, but those are conversations that we could have with the Bureau and, of course, the superintendent's office. Okay, Mr. Chair, one more question.
- 0:04:10 Okay, so on page eight, the essential supply costs you have on the ARPA expiration, and that's transferred to the local. Again, that's the same reason why those funds were in jeopardy? Okay, so-- Well, not why the funds were in jeopardy. That was a decision that had to be made because critical personnel was put onto the ARPA project that expired. Okay, so what's the reason for the essential supply costs?
- 0:04:39 Since there are no more ARPA funds, that had to go back to the general fund, that's what you're saying? Yeah, so a lot of the day-to-day operations of the department was placed on the ARPA to help to ease up the local funding, and now have to be returned. Okay. And what's your total indirect costs that's waiting in the drawdown queue now? Oh, Senator, I don't have that number. We don't have that number. Okay, through the chair, can we request the total indirect costs drawdown? Yes. Thank you, thank you for the time, Mr. Chair. You're welcome, Senator Fonseca.
- 0:05:19 Before we go on to the next senator, which would be Senator Clifford-Joseph. Commissioner, I noticed in your testimony you talk about security services that there were zero disbursement. Zero disbursement. So who paid for that? Who paid for this money that you had here for St. Cory District as well as the St. Thomas District, almost 1.4 million dollars? So that, this service, Senator, was on ARPA, and that's no longer available, so this is an additional cost that's needed.
- 0:05:53 We are in conversation with OMB about these mandatory costs, and like stated in the testimony, we are reducing our usage of Ranger America for any more services since we've installed cameras or in the process of installing cameras. We're going to have to have a lot of conversation about that, Senator VLA, in terms of schools. So, obviously, I know that I offered a bill recently for school security issues as well as the monitors. So tell me, what is being done in terms of investing in our school monitors training? So I'll let Esi Som speak to that. He's over the monitors.
- 0:06:38 Thank you. Thank you, Commissioner Victor. So I'm the third assistant commissioner of education. We are pumping in a tremendous amount of professional development. Every time teachers and administrators have professional development, so will monitors. So there are two great examples. At the end of this school year, both districts provided professional development. When teachers have professional development on August 11th and 12th, again, both districts will be offering professional development to include things like de-escalation, to include things like conflict resolution, social emotional wellness. So we are pumping in a tremendous amount of professional development to attempt to professionalize our school monitors. So you're offering off-island training? Are you doing a training curriculum locally? What is the plan?
- 0:07:27 We're using local resources such as the Bureau of Corrections, the Rajan's police department, the Department of Health, we're using in-house on-island support for professional development. Okay. At some point, I'd love to share and review that curriculum that's been put together. I'd appreciate that. All right. Thank you. Thank you. You got a point? A point of information, Senator Hubbard-Frederick. Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon again. Commissioner, can you let me know if anyone in your senior management team received raises in this \$8.6 million increase?
- 0:08:14 Was executive raises included in any of that whatsoever from last year to this year? Oh, no. No, Senator. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much, Senator Frederick. Senator Joseph, you're recognized for your six months. You'll be followed by Senator Potter, our Senate President. Good afternoon. Good evening to the listening public. Good evening to the central staff here at the legislature. Good evening to Dr. Wells and her management team.
- 0:08:49 First question I have is the post-added report have a contract with VIA for \$110,000 and one for \$53,000 to provide telephone service to all schools in St. Thomas-St. John District. Is this accurate? Yes, Senator. Page 11. Page 11. Yes, Senator. Page 11. It's accurate?

- 0:09:15 Yes, Senator. Okay. Page 11. Let me ask with the Mitel telephone system that you have for \$85,760, \$796 for the phone system. How much schools are covered by the system? All of our schools, Senator. For the whole island of St. Croix as well? St. Croix. All schools, Senator. So you actually could pick up a phone from one school and just dial the extension for everybody else? Correct.
- 0:09:56 And that includes our offices as well. Correct. And that includes our offices as well. Good. So do you guys use BIT? Because I noticed that you also ordered software from one in court for \$250,000. So we are not on the BIT infrastructure. We do use BIT for consulting. Consultation should we run into any issues.
- 0:10:31 VIDE has its separate and apart infrastructure for technology. Okay. Okay. I just find it that if they already have most of the licensure for GIV for the administrative branch, why you guys are not apart, but if you're saying that you guys are different. Okay. As far as St. Croix with the five or six bus drivers that you released, that were part of the opera funds? No, that's a part of management decision to outsource the maintenance and operation of the sped routes to where we are in negotiations right now with Abramson.
- 0:11:20 So come for the new school year, these folks will just be out lay-aft? Well, we met-- The six bus drivers? We met with all of the employees that are affected, Senator. They were asked to present their resume so that we could see where they may qualify for additional positions within the department. Okay. As far as-- What does the chief turn a wrong officer do?
- 0:11:50 So this year we have six schools that will be receiving intensive support to in terms of instructional strategies, online support, professional development. And we are doing that because we need to create some model schools within the territory laboratory schools that will serve as demonstration schools to assist the other schools. This year we are producing our report cards which will rate our schools based on a formula that was created by the department. Once that's released, the territory will see that there's definitely a need for us to work intensively with our schools and the level of instruction that they are providing to our students. And the strategy planning manager, what's the difference between-- I mean what-- Go ahead.
- 0:12:50 Go ahead. Go ahead. So the strategic planning manager deals with our strategic planning processes. We are in the process of downsizing some of those positions within the office of the commissioner senator and placing individuals in places where there may be additional needs. And so that position along with some others are being considered as well. So you don't think any of them would need to go over to the school, the bureau of school construction? No, senator.
- 0:13:22 Okay. You say you had 79 position that's no longer with the feds. Again, what's the plan for those individuals like-- One minute. You brought them over, you got back. Prior to the opera being taken away, you had a plan in place. So realistically, you guys are planning for the return of this money?
- 0:14:01 I know you said you had two days coming up, but you're going to have a plan in place that's going to go rapidly in spending the money and correcting issues that we have around here for the upcoming school year? So thank you for that question, Senator. That's a two-fold question. So I mentioned that some of the local employees were placed on the ARP budget during the time that the ARP fundings were available to help to relieve some of the funding off of the general fund. Now that the ARP budget has expired, we have to move them back to the local budget, which are critical positions such as teachers, power professionals, IT technicians, et cetera. When it comes to the management of the liquidation of the ARP fund, the federal grants unit at the state level will be managing or keeping track or holding the individuals accountable. Like I said, 30 million of that money is going to be executed by the Bureau. And so that will require us to be in constant conversation to get updates on those projects. Right now, before the administration changed, we had about \$8.9 million in the queue that was ready for payment. So we're going to start to process once we have the go-ahead from OMB and Department of Finance, then we will be able to push through the invoices that have been sitting there for payment. Okay.
- 0:15:37 That would be good. Mr. Chair, can I ask one more question, please? Yes, Senator, you may. Okay. Commissioner Wells. The Supreme Court issued a ruling relative to the special education, the case of AJT versus Osseo. To you guys, I mean, I know you said you might be losing a few of the special education teachers, but any plans of over this summer, like, on a steady recruiting, especially for special education? Because I surely don't want to see any suitcases coming forward from here in the BIA pertaining to children not getting the service that they need. So, Senator, we share the same sentiment.
- 0:16:28 We were able to, or were in the process of transitioning some of those critical SPED positions onto local to allow for some additional funding to be used to provide the specialized services that our students need. So, in terms of vacancies around special education, the HR division is constantly recruiting, and we know the importance of having those individuals available, and we will continue our efforts to fill any vacancies that we may have in that particular area. Thank you for your answers, and thank you for the time, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much, Senator Clifford-Joseph, for your line of questions, and we are nearing the end.

- 0:17:13 Commissioner, I know we did a recent soft rollout of the VI-centric civics textbooks recently. Where are we with getting them out into the schools and making sure that we get that curriculum going? Dr. Charleswell? Good evening, Dr. Renee Charleswell, Deputy Commissioner of Curriculum and Instruction. So, the schools actually have the textbooks. They have what they need to roll out for the upcoming school year. Excellent.
- 0:17:44 What about textbooks on the whole? Is there funding, sufficient funding available for textbooks? Or are you moving away from that? We're doing electronic textbooks these days? Or what's happening with funding for textbooks? So, we have the textbooks that we need. There may be some additions that need to be updated. Dr. Charleswell, do you have any information on that? You're talking about overall textbooks, Senator? Correct. Can I yield to the districts on that as to what the textbook needs?
- 0:18:18 Dr. Bastian Knight, St. Croix District. In the past year or two, we have done adaptations in the different content areas. So, for the most part, all our textbooks are up to date and new. And disseminated to the schools. Except for the social studies. Except for the social studies, correct. Very well. So, there is no funding requirement for textbooks at this time? No, we were able to take in a lot of that cost under the ARP funding where we did those major adaptations. Okay, great. At this time, the Chair will recognize Senator Milton Potter. You're recognized for your six minutes. Thank you very much.
- 0:18:54 Thank you, thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon, colleagues. And special good evening to you, Commissioner Deanne Wells-Hedrington, and the members of your executive team. I want to ask you, Commissioner, right out the gate, how do you justify eliminating programs that impact hundreds of students for such minimal savings? I'm talking about the interscholastic elimination of the interscholastic program.
- 0:19:26 You're talking about like 0.13% of the overall budget. I just wanted to get your feedback on that. So, Senator, the department does not want to eliminate any programs. We just don't have the funding to offset that cost. Well, considering the-- and I don't see interscholastics as just an extra or add-on. I see it as really fundamental to educating our kids. I know we have issues with retention. And those types of programs really lead to, you know, increased retention, you know, students are coming to school, scholarship opportunities for some students. So, I think just from a cost-benefit analysis, it just seems to me to be something that should be a greater priority.
- 0:20:26 So, Senator, during-- after this budget season, I know that we have an opportunity to do some budget markups. Those are conversations that we are having with the Office of Management and Budget. Because like you, we know that these are critical things that need to be offered for our students. Thank you, Commissioner. Given that 53% of teachers lack proper certification, what concrete steps will be addressed, will be utilized, I should say, to address this crisis? I know you have the Grow Your Own initiative. That might be one of them.
- 0:21:03 So, Grow Your Own is to fill vacancies. We're talking about having our teachers certified. And so, one of the measures that we took this year was to include certification as part of the evaluation processes. So, there's a percentage of their evaluation that goes to teacher certification. So, I've gotten a lot of feedback from teachers who are not pleased with meeting or with the department taking the position to include it in the overall evaluation. But that's part of your responsibility as an educator is to be certified. So, we will continue our efforts. We've provided a professional learning suite that gives them professional development courses to get the credit hours so that they can get their recertification. We've done all that we can do except to hold hands and take them to complete.
- 0:22:01 How does it, I mean, do we have a sense as to how it really impacts the quality of education, the lack of certification? Is it something that's real, that has a significant impact, or is it just something that folks have to do? Well, it has a significant impact because it's part of your professional responsibility. There's nowhere that you can go that you don't need your certification. But when it comes to them receiving professional development and being supported, it doesn't change that. Whether you're certified or not, the district still gives the requisite support because we want to make sure that our people have what they need and the strategies that they need to have in order to work with our students. But as a professional, you should be certified. I am going through certification as we speak. Absolutely.
- 0:22:52 As a professional, you should be certified. And, you know, but I just wanted to get a sense as to do we do any sort of analysis, certified teachers versus teachers who are not certified, the quality of the delivery of instructions, retentions, and all that. So, I think, Senator, we could probably go a little deeper with that. Thank you for that suggestion because it would be a good analysis to see if those who receive those high, you know, evaluation scores actually, you know, are certified. That's a good study that we could do.
- 0:23:29 Dr. Renee Charles, I wanted to add something else as well to that. So, even with certification, Senator, it's also tied to some of our federal funding. So, we look at how we look at highly qualified teachers and certification falls under that and it actually affects the funding that we get in some of the grants when it comes to certification. So, overall, there is some effect. Even if the delivery is good, we're still looking at how it impacts our funding. Understood. Thank you for that.

Now, with 174 employees eligible for retirement and only 51 new hires, how will you prevent a staffing crisis?

0:24:08 So, like we mentioned earlier, Senator, we've done some right sizing. So, you know, we did a complete analysis with the Division of Human Resources with our PRE director. We looked at our numbers and the superintendents as well. We looked at our numbers. We saw where we had overage of teachers in some schools and we made the adjustments accordingly. As Director Jacobs indicated, recruitment is ongoing. We are in competition now with other states because everybody has teacher shortages.

0:24:40 So, we'll continue to do our best effort to fill our vacancies in the interim. You know, where we could use distance learning for teachers, we would do so as well. Thank you. Graduation rates vary between districts. I think St. Croix is 79.3%. St. Thomas St. John, 83%. Would that be considered significant? And if so, what accounts for the disparity in districts? That's a good question, Senator.

0:25:15 There may be several factors that would account for that variance that you see there. Time. But I want to say that, let's wait for 25, 24, 25 data to come out. Let's see how St. Croix really does in terms of comparisons. I know that I was able to attend the graduations and, you know, Complex, for example, had 100% graduation rate. So, I think those numbers are subject to change. But what I want us to pay attention to is, look where we were in the 60s and now we're moving towards the 80s. So, we're moving in the right trajectory. Definitely.

0:25:50 We just have to continue our efforts. Thank you for that. Final, just one final question. I know a friend of mine will not let me rest if I don't ask you this question. It's about, again, about interscholastic sports and funding for travel. Is there a division, a specific percentage that is allotted based on the specific sport, like softball, basketball, track and field and the like? How do you decide how to, I guess, utilize financial resources for travel, where I think the perception is the popular sports like basketball tends to get the lion's share of the funding when the less popular sports, not so much?

0:26:43 Well, it depends on the league, Senator. So, we have inter-island competitions and it depends on the league. It also happens that basketball, to me, has the most leagues outside of the Department of Education that our children participate in. But we don't limit the offering. So, if the softball teams want to travel outside the territory, those are things that we would entertain. They just have to bring the proposals forward. But when it comes to the inter-island, it depends on the leagues, it depends on the schedules, and that's how we distribute the money. So, we're always looking for ways to expand.

0:27:21 We are looking to support the chair leaders, and we have done a little bit more of that. The girls came after us for that. And then exposing our girl basketball teams to stuff outside. We are also open to anything. So, it just is what is available. A track and field. Anything that's available that they need support with, they just have to let it be known to the Division of Sports and Athletics, and we work with them. And they'll be getting fair and equal consideration. It's fair.

0:27:50 It's just that sometimes people don't come forward, Senator. Okay. So, if you don't come forward and make your petition known, we're not mind readers. We're not going to figure that out. We're focusing on the inter-island stuff. So, anything outside would have to be them coming in to tell us, hey, we want to provide this opportunity for our students. This is what we've done. This is the proposal. And then we work from there. Thank you, Commissioner. I won't abuse my time anymore. Thank you very much for your flexibility, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much, Senator Potter. And Senator Potter, talking about the inter-scholastic funding also reminded me about the music programs, having sufficient funding for instruments and everything else.

0:28:30 What's happening in that space in regard to our music programs? I don't think we have a need for instruments at all. I know that they have done a large order through the ARP funding, but the superintendents can speak to that. Dr. Bastian Knight. Good afternoon. Good evening. Bastian Knight, St. Croix District. Like the Commissioner said, we have no need for musical instruments in the St. Croix District. Through the ARP funding, we're able to maximize our ordering for all our schools. We are stocked with instruments. Instruments that you've never seen before are sitting in our schools. Excellent, excellent. Same response. Same response. Yeah. What about travel expenses?

0:29:10 All students, whenever they go away, they seem to excel. I mean, with STEM, mathematics, whatever they're involved in, do we have sufficient set-aside funding for travel expenses? So I know we did in the past through the ARP funding, but I don't know, superintendents, if we've budgeted anything within the consolidated grant application, like the Harvard experience and some of those other things that the students were involved with. Any thoughts?

0:29:36 Dr. Juergen, St. Thomas, St. John. A lot of those things came out of ARP, but we do have some funding in the CGA for scholastic travel as well. Okay. Yeah. I saw you gloat a lot about that during the graduations in terms of those exceptional representation that our students had. I'd love to see when our students compete nationally and do well. And excel, of course, of course. And Vivis, is Vivis up and running in the schools? Vivis is up and running.

- 0:30:06 I don't think that the utilization within the schools is where it should be. My PRE director, James Richardson, is working on that. We have been able to utilize that platform to give us tremendous amount of data. So it's a matter of educating our teachers, our principals, which would be a focus for this upcoming school year. Okay. And technology infrastructure, how does that look for our schools at this time? I mean, it's so important. It's creeping along. It's coming along. Connectivity.
- 0:30:41 Inter-conductivity and everything. Connectivity is coming along. So the team is steadily working. We did some restructuring within the IT division. We now have a lead in St. Croix and a lead in St. Thomas, responsible for the infrastructure for our schools. So that's work in progress. But the team is committed. We do have some consultants that have been working with them to identify the areas of gaps. And so we're working to make sure that we have not only reliable internet access, but a backup system as well. Okay.
- 0:31:15 And my final question, do we have any further consolidation of schools? Are we satisfied that we have arrived at the threshold that we want to be, or are we still contemplating or considering additional consolidation of schools? Senator, to be honest, I don't think that would ever be off the table based upon the trajectory that we're seeing with population. For example, a school like Juanita Godin has gone down to about 200 as a K-8 school. So we definitely can't say hard, fast, no. It's based on what trends we see at the time. Okay.
- 0:31:55 That's a good honest answer. Colleagues, I think this round out. Any burning questions? Senator Vila, you recognize? Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chigui. I've done it before the meeting is over to put on the record that congratulations to Ricardo Richards Blue Ribbon School. Just presented at the conference. Where was the conference? Mother school conference. Mother school in schools. And that's a giant accomplishment for the Virgin Islands. Yes. That's why I want a school to stay open and not consolidate it with the next school.
- 0:32:25 Because it brings everybody that think about Ricardo Richards think about excellence. Right, right. And I don't want to change that. It's just like a given. So everyone that works, everyone that goes, they understand that there's these high expectations. I don't want to change what they have. So if we could somehow maintain that, let's maintain that. And I wanted to put on the record, I heard the conversation, a reference to the graduation rate, which is a very interesting conversation. But I always think to myself, what about the number of students who are tested on grade level?
- 0:32:57 And how do we correlate those students on the honor roll as to what percentage of them are tested on grade level? I always wanted to kind of know that data. Those students are members of the honor society. How many of them are actually on the honor roll? And then look to see as to whether or not the numbers are true reflection in terms of what we're trying to say. Like all your honor society students should be on grade level. You would agree? I would agree, Senator. And that's an analysis that the districts definitely should do.
- 0:33:30 And when you look at it, because the St. Thomas District actually had more students, or the graduation rate is higher. But the St. Croix District test scores are higher. But the graduation rates are lower. So then, you know, let's have those deep dive as to exactly what is happening and what is working and what are the expectations. And I'm hoping that as we move on, that a lot of those areas, we begin to have norms in which the grade point average to be on the honor roll is the same in every district and every school. And our society, the same in every district and every school. Because there are times when you're saying, well, at one point at Complex, I had X amount of students in the honor society.
- 0:34:18 And I saw a next school that had way more students. And I was like, by God, I'm not doing well. But then when I asked, our requirement was 90% in every class, and the next school was 85. So naturally, they had more. So if you begin to make that standard, you know, then we could really begin to determine what is going on at those schools. I just wanted to put that on the record. Thank you so much. So if I may, Senator, you're absolutely correct. And we have started to look at creating that parity in both districts and within districts itself. So the team, the superintendent's teams, have been looking at the multi-tiered system of supports, how we address behavior, how we address academics, and start to standardize the process. So thank you for that. That's a good point. Thank you very much, Senator Bayless. Senator De Graffi, we recognize for your burning question.
- 0:35:08 Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon, Commissioner. Again, vacancies. How many vacancies, yeah? Director Jacobs. I'll actually give that to Mr. Gumbs. Good afternoon, Senator. Good afternoon. We have, on the budget for 26, we have 17 funded vacancies. Funded at what? 50%, 100%? Funded at 100%. Okay. And we have a lot of unfunded. How much is that number a lot?
- 0:35:50 I would have to get back to you with that, the unfunded total. Okay. Okay. We could get that through the chair. Okay. You have on your testimony, Commissioner, just to close out, page six, unclassified employee salaries, 2026, \$10,392,470, a variance of \$1,010,124. What is that for? Or how does that work? Page six of the commissioner's testimony, the unclassified employee salaries. DC Harris or Mr. Gumbs, can you respond to that? It's on page six.

- 0:36:35 Yes. Could you repeat the question, Senator? On page six, there is unclassified employee salaries. FY 26, \$10,392,470. It's a variance or difference from 25 up, an increase of \$1,010,124. Well, I want to say salary increases because it's unclassified. Unclassified?
- 0:37:13 Yeah. Table two. Yeah. Um, Senator, the most I could attribute that to is the hiring of some additional exempt employees for the fiscal year. Okay. So you don't have help me. Remember now, when we brought over those individuals from the federal and to the local side, some of those individuals are, were, well, are unclassified and classified employees.
- 0:37:49 Uh-huh. So the total is 79 that you brought over. Uh-huh. Some of the 79 are classified and unclassified. Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Okay. So, um, and it, it amounts to the same 5 million, 5.7 million overall? Overall. Okay. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Uh-huh. Thank you very much, Senator DeGraff. Commissioner, I deliberately left this question so I'll ask, how are you doing? How are you making out? I mean, you have a lot on your plate. How are you making out?
- 0:38:22 How are you taking care of your behavioral health? Very good question, Senator. Um, I'm well and I, I want to say thank you to my team because, um, without the team, this wouldn't be possible. So, kudos to my team and I am taking a little time for myself in a few weeks, um, just to just disconnect. Um, the job is a lot, but again, I'm committed and I would do whatever I need to do to make sure that these children have what they need, Senator.
- 0:38:52 So, what about this assignment, this mission that you're on, keeps you up at night? What's keeping me up at night is when Melvin Gumbs tells me I don't have money for critical positions. So, right now it's just getting this budget to where we're able to adequately sustain ourselves and do what we need to do for our schools. Very well. Yeah, we, we have a lot of, you know, it's a scary time for, for government, it's a scary time with the federal, um, you know, through our box cloud box that we're having and it put us all in a disadvantage and, and create some anxiety. So, you know, I just wanted to get that from you. Um, so I'll give you a minute to, to just, uh, issue your closing statement at this time. So I just want to say thank you to this body. Um, you guys have been a breath of fresh air.
- 0:39:41 I have to say it publicly. Um, it is truly a blessing to be able to collaborate and for us to work together for the betterment of the Virgin Islands and for our children. So thank you for the opportunity for us to put our budget, um, needs on record. And we're looking forward to a wonderful 2025, 2026 school year, Senator. Very well. Again, thank you very much to the team at the Department of Education. And again, you're a defendant of your, the governor's proposed budget of \$179,316,999. The Committee of Budget Appropriations and Finance, again, want to thank, um, you know, the central staff, everyone that participated, our post audit division, everyone that participated in making, uh, this hearing a success today. Tomorrow we continue, um, with our efforts with three more, uh, agencies. Uh, I want to thank my staff as well.
- 0:40:37 And the Committee of Budget Appropriations and Finance is hereby adjourned. God bless. Oh, my God. [3 such phrases repeated 12 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]
- 0:43:57 Oh, my God. [1 such phrases repeated 11 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]
- 0:49:27 Oh, my God.

## 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.

- 5x **Senator Milton E. Potter**  
heard in this transcript as: Milton Potter, Potter
- 3x **Senator Dwayne DeGraff**  
heard in this transcript as: De Graffi, DeGraff
- 3x **Senator Kurt VLA**  
heard in this transcript as: VLA, Vila
- 2x **Senator Carla Joseph**  
the surname alone also matches: Clifford Joseph; Karla J. Joseph  
heard in this transcript as: Joseph
- 2x **Senator Hubert Frederick**  
heard in this transcript as: Frederick

- 2x **Senator Ray Fonseca**  
heard in this transcript as: Fonseca
- 2x **Dr. Stefan Juergen**  
heard in this transcript as: Juergen