



Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance

Legislature USVI

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0:00:00 I'll see you guys next time. Oh, my God.

0:01:00 so Thank you. of budget appropriations of finances out of recess and back in record at this time senator frederick you may conclude or wrap up your your question if you would please tell me what you were able to come up with 91 in general fund the Mike please, Mike three.

0:02:27 Go ahead. Go ahead. Claudette Farrington, for general fund, there are 91 positions total, of which 10 of those positions are vacant. And our information is consistent with the post auditor's analysis. So we're on the same page here, it's 91 and 10 are vacant. Okay, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Appreciate the time. Thank you very much, Senator Frederick. At this time, the Chair will recognize Senator Angel Bolquez. You're recognized for your five minutes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning, Mr. Chair. Good morning, colleagues. Good morning to the... Oh, good afternoon. Good afternoon, everyone. Good afternoon, central staff. Good afternoon to the listening and viewing audience, and good afternoon to the Lieutenant Governor's office and its divisions leadership team. For fiscal year 2025 it looks like you've nearly about 45 percent of your appropriation remains either unallotted or unobligated and I wanted to know what contributes in short what contributed to that under utilization of those funds. I ask the question because there is a lot of maintenance to be done, AC repair, elevator, and other issues at hand, and I'm curious to know with money that's available, what's slowing down the process? Is it the procurement process?

0:04:02 Is it the unavailability of funds? What is it exactly? good afternoon senator Claudette Farrington when it comes to the general fund the monies are basically for personal services and fringe so it has to do with the positions that are available and we do have plans for the funds in terms of the positions we're looking forward to going forward in 2026 so So we're going to be creating, for example, we have the three real property tax appraisal one positions. We would like to create some additional positions on St. Thomas and John, the district here, because of retirement, that division was more or less, I don't want to use the word crippled, but we were able to add three and we have additional persons that have been

interviewed and we can create those positions with those funding to try to bring people on board again now if we know that going forward in 2026 the funding will be there to address them okay thank you for that clarification when it comes to real property tax um in that division i see that you inspected 883 properties but i believe the inventor inventory is well above 600 oh no sorry 60 000 parcels um what is the office doing to improve that assessment coverage uh to ensure up-to-date property records ludence romney tax assessor uh that's one of the areas that i alluded to that we are short staffed and that contributes to that so we were without basically any appraisers for a little while we have three and in the short time that they have been here they've made an impact on on that in in

0:06:04 uh assessing properties that had escaped uh recognition of improvements made to those properties so having the having additional assess appraisers will assist us in making room for that and we alluded to that about with the mass appraisal also that we need to have all the appraisers in place because and that's we shouldn't even think of that as an expense we should think of that as an investment because as we are able to appraise the properties that exist with the improvements, then there is more money for the tax collector to collect to take care of our needs in the government and the community. Duly noted.

0:06:50 Concerning your NAIC standards and your obligation to oversee the banking and insurance divisions and conducting examinations and audits of insurance companies, you have a backlog in that area as well, what's being done to to speed up that process. Attorney Matthew? Good afternoon, Glendina Matthew, Division of Banking, Insurance and Financial Regulations. The backlog that we have is in the financial services area, every entity that we regulate most of them have a component where we're supposed to review each financial statements on a quarterly basis so what we have been doing because we don't have sufficient staffing we have made sure all the active companies doing business in the territory whether mortgage lenders insurance we're doing those reviews but ultimately we would have like to be able to review all companies that are doing any type of business okay very well and before my time expires I wanted to put on a record as you are responsible for overseeing these companies particularly we have we have Emancipation Day and we have the Hamilton Jackson Day I became aware that regarding a specific bank which I would not put on the record right now but apparently that bank does not let its employees but it doesn't close on that day and it does not provide holiday pay for those employees I see the matter as a labor equity issue and a cultural respect issue you know the Hamilton Jackson Day Emancipation Day are very important holidays here in the Virgin Islands you also know that I also wrote a letter to the Division of Banking and

0:08:58 insurance taken to earlier in July this month to request the inquiry on the matter I haven't received a response but what regulatory authority or influence do you have in your in that division to ensure that these financial institutions operating in the territory honor these legally established holidays by law Good afternoon, Gladina Matthew, Division of Banking Insurance and Financial Regulations. We are in receipt of year 83, and I did respond and indicate we will be bringing it before the board.

0:09:42 I think there may be some misunderstanding as to what the other banks are also doing, because we did some review as to what the other banks are doing, particular to certain holidays, but nevertheless the Banking Board it will be brought to the Banking Board's attention. I would truly appreciate that and I thank you again for all of that the lieutenant governor office does you work very hard your collections are great they could be greater but I appreciate each and every one of you and efforts and Mr. Chair thank you so much for the leniency. Thank you very much Senator Angel Bocas, Jr. Acting Chief of Staff, Harrigan. How was the morale at LGO? Well, Nadia Harrigan, Acting Chief of Staff, Legal Counsel. Morale could always be better everywhere.

0:10:37 What I will say is that one of the issues would be the workplace environments. recorded as an example the mold count was high and that adversely affected morale and by moving them to a safe workplace that indeed helped I was very intentional about mentioning every employee at the office of the lieutenant governor in my testimony to let them know that they are important and they are appreciated and that they are valued by the office of the lieutenant governor so that is also an environment that I am trying to create as well and reinforce is there any other initiative that's been undertaken again to improve morale of bringing employees together throughout the LGO yes well as you know I've been doing this maybe two months but we are talking about meeting and coming up with ideas about doing some employee bonding and activities so we did meet yesterday and discuss a couple but we will be bringing them to fruition and also there's been a lot more interaction with the employees also with management which is also helping in hearing the employees concerns and issues so you know as you stated we're the second largest revenue maker in the government and we spend a lot of time at least eight hours a day together and we want to make sure our employees are happy and we're gonna take steps to bring that to fruition excellent what about the cadastral office is there any intent to hire additional individuals within the cadastral office there is we do have a

0:12:26 newer employee in the cadastral division but for succession planning we are definitely looking into um prospective employees okay all right thank you for your response there senator maurice james you recognize for your five minutes thank you mr chair good morning virgin islands good morning testifiers thank you for being here good morning colleagues good afternoon good afternoon thank you um good afternoon staff everyone in and outside the room. I am going to advocate for the lieutenant governor's office today because I so agree with my my colleague who who spoke about the timeshares and and the other issues and almost everything that he spoke about because as a new member of the Finance Committee I too am now becoming aware of the salaries within the government as a whole something I did not know before and that's one of the benefits of being on a Finance Committee and it really is unfortunate that the position of lieutenant governor which is an elected position gets caught up in the controversy of compensation because in the last two months I have sat here and seen where other agency heads are making 175 200 250 300 and above and because of how crazy and I mean madness we have with this compensation we're not realizing that an an agency like this that is the second highest generating um revenue agency has employees that are always working because if they're collecting all this money they're always working think about it and I'll focus for example on one group because I am an attorney so I'll focus on the attorneys I have seen in the last few months where attorneys and other agencies are making upwards of \$200,000. Now, if you have an agency head like the Lieutenant Governor making only \$125,000,

0:15:02 it is difficult for the attorneys who are working extremely hard, and I'm saying attorneys only as a as a an example they won't be able to make more than the 125 unless the lieutenant governor consolidates for example attorney harrigan the young attorney and and that i and i like all the attorneys in lieutenant governor's office by the way i need to say that i i really love your professionalism, but here she is occupying two positions, chief of staff and legal counsel. I don't know what her salary is, but it probably isn't combined, but if it is, it's deserving, right? That's the problem we have with what's going on in this territory with paying um the right salary for performance a high performing um agency like the lieutenant governor's office where you are seeing the division of banking had a nine percent increase over fiscal year 2024 in its revenue collections the division of corporations and trademarks 9.77 over fiscal year 2024. Passports they also saw an increase in in their collections I could go through every single one of these divisions and then we have vacancies that really if filled would cause us to collect even more money like the appraisers um my colleague just now from st john pointed out that only 883 properties are inspected and yet it's over 60 000 parcels in the territory that's not even one that's not even one percent i can't i can't even i'm not never to figure out quickly the math right but that is ridiculous um

0:17:03 So I want to ask this, so I am advocating for higher salaries for everybody in the lieutenant governor's office, including the lieutenant governor. I will say that right now on the floor because the other employees cannot, if you think about it, their salaries cannot increase unless his increases. everybody needs to understand that we're being foolish in this government in terms of compensation especially when it comes to a high performing group of people my only disappointment is that you have not moved one minute and building and i don't like answers like soon as possible soon when no date is really given when it comes to contracts like construction contracts and real property contracts you when you enter if if you're soliciting for specifications if you're if you're any any type of renovation rehabilitation there should be some agreement that tells me when something is going to be delivered so I have a I have an issue with that's that's the biggest disappointment for me today because these employees have stayed in that building for so many years and and again making so little money the the only question I have really would love us to solve the appraiser problem you we saw that you you got appraisers on the island of St. Thomas, did you get any additional on the island of St. Croix? And my questions are all about the appraisers. How do you train your appraisals, appraisers, and is there any coordination with

0:18:54 the University of the Virgin Islands, so that we can get young Virgin Islanders in these positions, making more than really what's listed there, by the way. How can we do that? We need to unite so that we don't have only 883 properties inspected. People are building on this island. I'm not as familiar with St. Thomas and St. John, but I see people building all over the island of St. Croix. And also with respect to appraisals, I have another question, which is, is there any coordination with the Department of Planning and Natural Resources so that when building is happening in terms of issuance of permits that the your office is advised or informed of that. Mr. Chiravan thank you I heard my time is calling I don't want to abuse it but this particular agency as you know is dear to my heart because I've worked with them for so long and I have seen and by the way one more thing you lost an employee in a recorder of deeds because again of the low salary I know that personally because I know the young lady and I know her qualifications and she was stolen by a title company this is going to happen when we don't pay people what they're worth okay thank you thank you all but i i love your agency but we need to to find a way to increase your revenues even more than the nine percent that we've been seeing because think of how much has been escaping and um i'm glad my colleague raised the issue about the time shares and provided me with information thank you mr chair uh thank you very much senator maurice james uh anyone from the team want to

- 0:20:44 to respond to the concerns raised about the appraisals? Lorencie Romney, tax assessor. Right now in St. Croix, there are five appraisals. We only have three in St. Thomas, and so we're trying to bring on more here. But in the long run, we actually have a projection for more than those 10. We need, should I say, about how much we need right now? To be honest, we need about 20 to do what we need to do because when we get into full gear to do the mass appraisal and so on, we need that kind of counting among our appraisals to be able to cover the properties that need to be covered. and that's what i'm saying it's an investment because then we are able to bring in revenues that is lying dormant because we don't have enough people to go out and appraise the properties for them to be have the correct value on the books to to bring in the revenues to the to the government uh thank you very much for for that and i'm hoping that we could really ramp it up the issue is also that appraisals are very difficult to come by i know that we made some some modification recently through legislation to allow for some apprenticeship and train-up to address that shortage. I wanted to move on. Go ahead.
- 0:22:20 Senator James also mentioned about that. Right now the new appraisers that came on board, they are required to have certain certifications. So there are courses through the international association of appraising officers that they will have to take one to maintain their employment as well as to advance to another level. Right now they are appraiser one but we have positions for appraiser two, appraiser three and supervising appraiser and so my colleague alluded to the issue of changing the job specs when we were bringing them on so we've through the assistance of division of personnel we've changed the job specifications so that there is growth among the appraisers as they walk along so so they're not in a dead-end position when they come in also we thinking in terms of yes some apprenticeship and and even some outreach to educate the public as to what appraisers do because there There are folks who have seen the new appraisers here and they are actually wanting to know if they can do that kind of job because they see them out in the field.
- 0:23:41 And so we have some plans to strengthen those things. Excellent. Real quickly, I wanted to move on to another issue. We moved legislation sometime back, Act 8542, which spoke to the remote notaries and also increase the fees for notary. To this day, a notary could only charge \$5 in some instances for documents to be notarized. I know with that legislation, it was increased somewhat, and then the lieutenant governor had issued a stay while there was some consideration given to the increase in the fee that since 2022, I just wanted to ask if there have been any conversation in respect to, again, moving that legislation in place and allowing for the notaries to be able to increase the cost for a notary notary harrigan chief acting chief of staff legal counsel there have been discussions but um an official formal decision has not been made so but i will bring it to um the lieutenant governor's attention very well thank you uh senator bloody recognize your point of information thank you mr chair mr robney in respect to appraisers because another unique trade and we are very sure when it comes to appraisal you say you want to get at least 20. do you have a plan in terms of ramping up to get to the 20 number two i know it's summer you had summer interns then you should have brought in interns for that um that in that office did you do that and what the plan moving forward until ramping up you're not going to get 21 time but do you have a plan to ramp up to get 220 and assure that we have enough appraisers in the
- 0:25:25 territory yes one of the things is we would need appropriation from the legislature as well as i would need to speak with uh office of management and budget and the leadership within the lieutenant governor's office to to clarify how we do that but part of what how we are doing this is we had a study done by the international association of appraising officers where they did a gap analysis looking at our needs and so that's one of the things that guide what we do as well as we're looking at the things we need to do to comply with the law with mass appraisal and so on so so those things will guide how we do that as we as we walk towards getting all those folks on board but what we will be doing too is have training in place. So there'll be online courses as well as at times there will be specific courses that the appraisers have to take that are in modules already. So it's not courses that we have to create. They already exist that will assist that appraiser to improve their expertise and be able to do the work that we need done.
- 0:26:37 So based on a gap analysis, we need a plan from you in order for us to see how much is needed as we move forward and ramping up to assist the department in having appraisers on board, okay? Not a problem. Thank you so much for your response. Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the time. Thank you, Senator Blyden. Senator Viala, you recognize your point of information? Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm seeing in the positions you have the title building appraiser and then you have real property tax appraiser. There's a difference with the two? Yes.
- 0:27:09 I'll allow our assistant tax appraiser to explain that difference, please. Shalma Mawad. Good afternoon. Shalma Mawad, assistant tax assessor. The building appraiser, assistant appraiser positions were the previous positions before the reclassification to the real property tax appraisers, one, two, and three. So same or similar duties, but new titles. Okay, so the bill and appraisers that's in the personal listing, those are individuals that have been with the Lieutenant Governor's Office for a number of years, and a real property tax appraiser, a new individual that just came on board?

- 0:27:53 That's correct. My understanding as far as I know is that the existing building appraiser positions at some point will also be, I guess, readjusted or reassigned to re-property tax one, two, three titles. I believe it may be under consideration with OMB, I'm not sure. Director Farrington may be able to assist a bit more with that clarification. One more question, I understand the answer, thank you so much for the answer.
- 0:28:28 how did you come up with the salary for the entry level that appraiser real estate appraiser which i'm seeing is 44 000 051. nationally the average is in the 50s is um i'm seeing 54 000 a median of 61 but an appraiser is more of a skilled position how did you come up with a 40 something well those positions are classified unionized uh the job specification has to go through division of personnel and as you know based on the job spec they will they will grade the position is the salary an issue in terms of attracting individuals i'm sorry repeat is the salary an issue in terms of attracting appraisers to come to the department well we've we've done good so far with the ones um and even at the 44 i guess it was higher than what some of the entry-level positions used to be before but as you indicated given the skill set required i'm sure it could be better and we would attract an even larger pool okay and the last question a number of exemptions are given after hurricane irma and maria in reference to property tax and damages the home correct correct so you have a listing of all those properties that receive an exemption yes has anyone gone to see if any of those properties are rebuilt and they need to go back to the original level of taxation yes so just about all of them are off of that exemption list okay thank you so much uh thank you very much um senator of VLA. And next, the chair will recognize Senator Dwayne DeGraff. You recognize for your five minutes.
- 0:30:17 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon, colleagues. Good afternoon, testifiers. All of you listening and present. Great presentation. And to your team, number two, give eye what you want. That's number one. You know, but I just looking at the numbers and I'm having some issues are the numbers okay so um thank you to your guys you and your team continue doing a great work um the act 89 16 you know it goes back to the total amount of employees i'm still getting 108 and even if i look at the posadal report from page 11 to 14 up to the top classified account 91 in 91 positions they're alone then on the end of 14 and then there's two unclassified down below and then on page 15 there's a whole nother set of individuals filled positions let's take it up to the 108. the 91 senators general fund we have employees sorry claudette farrington good afternoon we have employees funded on general fund um five of our main divisions we have employees funded on financial services and on commission of insurance fund i'm you know banking insurance okay i i got it okay so i i go to 91 and ten um act 89 16 your budget is 7 million 187 246. you have the 91 employees how many people receive wage increases or did anyone receive wage increases in 25 yes um the unionized rank and file members of steel workers the master agreement received increases in fiscal year you said 20 25 25 that's correct okay so you know what you do you know what the total amount was
- 0:32:23 um okay first of all it was approximately about 56 employees and the increases were around like 144 000 thereabouts okay okay good so so then based on act like i say based on uh act 89 60 25 budget your personnel and fringe alone comes at \$6,783,183, personal and fringe alone, not for your vacant positions or the additional monies they gave you. The difference of the additional monies that was given to you came to, for vacant positions, personal and fringe, \$265,862 and \$138,249. are you on a particular page page 89 no act 89 11 you're talking about the legislation for the budget your 25 budget okay correct so based on your 25 budget uh-huh on page three of the post audit report has a graph a pie and the pie says that as of the fourth quarter unused funds three million two hundred twenty one thousand nine hundred and seventy six dollars have you received your fourth quarter allotment as yet we receive we get them monthly so we receive allotments as of july so so what was the total amount you have received as of july um according to my calculation it's it's 5.3 million 5.3
- 0:34:19 no i i i need actual numbers yeah for real one minute and you go give me a total and then give me the breakdown if you can personal french how much is for personal how much is for french because that's your breakdown from the general fund. One minute, Senator. Okay. Okay, so while you look for it, I'll keep going.
- 0:34:47 The appropriation is \$7,187,246. Correct. As of June, what I have is that we receive... 30 seconds. It would be like \$5,390,219. Okay, so based on what post-addit report has, based on the appropriation, \$7,187,000, they have unused funds, \$3,221,976. but you say you've only received \$5,390,219 and you're asking for \$7,743,246 Okay, Senator Claudette Farrington you're comparing fiscal year 2025 when we had um less in terms of the numbers going up when we had less vacancies and some of the they were at not 100 percent 50 0.5 fte for 2026 um we are given a ceiling and within that ceiling you can accommodate once you address your fill positions you can accommodate as many vacancies as you can so once again like i say with all due respect if i may wrap up mr chair just in terms of we are in vacancies just in terms of your 25 budget six million seven hundred eighty three thousand one thirty five is your personal and friends for 25 you divide that by four the four quarters you come to 271 000 325. you keep doing quarters it's

- 0:36:50 no yeah you're right two million two million seven thirty one yes 2.7 so if if they're saying that the unused funds based on what the the the pie is for the the post-saddle report on page three is \$3,221,000. Your fourth quarter is covered and additional monies. Senator, again, it's done monthly. So if you go from October to July, that would give you three quarters and one month. So it's not four quarters.
- 0:37:29 No, but what I'm saying is your 25 budget, just to close out, Mrs. J, Your 25 budget is divided in four. I divided it in four when you add the personal and fringe. So in other words, I'm covering you with your amount of money that you're supposed to get, plus the addition. I want to make sure you cover your wage increases. But you went to \$7,000,007,000 from \$7,000,001,000. We added in for vacancies and stuff. And remove your vacancies, just went off your personal and fringe, throw in your wage increases and still came up over. So I'm just saying in your ask are we looking for more money? Is anybody else do wage increases? Is any retro owe to anyone? Any other monies that we have? 25? 25. No. No. We're good. No. We paid out the last set of increases those for 2025 for the master now the the supervisors union a few are a few among the steel workers as well we started a negotiation process and they will be going back to the table um in september i don't know how long that's going to take i don't know what the figure will be but it's a smaller group as opposed to the those on the master agreement and no estimation was in it for them what would happen in a case like that normally when they negotiate they if necessary they would have to the government overall identify the funding to address salary increases if you are unable to accommodate them in your current budget once the wage agreements have been signed okay so so thank you thank you for the
- 0:39:18 time mr. chair I appreciate it thank you thank you very much senator de Your budget for FYI, the request for FYI 2026 is increased by a little over \$5 million, correct? I mean \$500,000, \$556,000 to be exact. Is that money solely used for personnel or is there something else embedded in that amount? Personnel and fringe. Solely personnel and fringe. Personnel and fringe. Yes. \$556,000. Yeah.
- 0:39:47 And again, I don't want to say we're comparing apples and oranges. we're going from a year in 2025 our budget had decreased um so you would have a larger difference right but it's it's solely for personal and fringe right yes yes and then you spoke about the fact that a lot of your your vacancies then would with the ftes were some of them were 0.50 0.25 and different variations exactly understood uh are you doing any exit interviews i know that you spoke about the five individuals have resigned I'm hearing of employees with 15 18 years as that's leaving the divisions is there any exit interviewed of these individuals departure that will you know lead to some discussion in terms of how they could be salvaged or is it solely because of salaries or anything else I'm Nadia Harrigan acting chief of staff legal counsel there There aren't official exit interviews, which is something that we will begin. I've inquired about that. I have been speaking to some of the employees that are leaving or have left the department, and thank you, Senator James.
- 0:41:00 I am aware of the employee and the recorder of deeds, and I would be remiss by saying that some of the issues why people are leaving is due to low salaries, and they're either going to another government agency or a private firm or company or relocating a couple of our employees are have relocated to the states to the mainland so in those instances where you you have in discussion with them is there opportunities again to perhaps offer them some other position when you have tenured employees like that i mean 15 18 years is hard to lose them i mean you're not just losing those individuals you're losing a wealth of experience as well um is there any discussion with them in respect to how you know you could be able to hopefully salvage uh that relationship especially if it's salary maybe another position that may be available that they could qualify for a stipend whatever they'll take to to kind of just maintain those employees is there that type of opportunities there well that's something that we want to begin and having more open communications we can ascertain what the problem is maybe sooner than later the discussions that i've been having have been occurring after hearing that that person is now is separating from the department so we want to have more open conversations and some of them we have at least three employees who have been promoted they they may not have been happy or just wanted to be have upward mobility and one of them is here today our director of vi ship medicare rose marie maduro she's the former executive assistant administrative assistant to the chief of staff as well as an appraiser so those are conversations we want to have we have been having to let people know to see if we can retain employees as opposed to just leaving and being aware of problems before they decide to leave the office very well i know you have that skill set
- 0:42:57 you know when you work with me you certainly exhort it so i'm hoping you get a chance to exercises as well there uh senator colleges if you recognize for your five minutes thank you so much mr chairman a pleasant good day to the hard-working men and women of the office of the lieutenant governor i want to say one word when i see you guys hard working and cha-ching guys bringing in the moolah the money and i am for one in very much in support of doing what we can here legislatively because you're collecting the money that's what pays all of us the taxpayers money is what pays us and for us to provide the required services to our people so i want to first of all I'll ask you, and this question, I'm not sure if it's going to go to Ms. Farrington or Attorney Harrigan, but I wanted to ask you, how many funds do you have in

the Lieutenant Governor's office? How many funds are there that you have under your purview? And these are separate from the general fund.

0:44:25 Mr. Chair, hold my time, please. Okay, so one. I'm making sure I don't miss, excuse me, I'm making sure I don't miss a fund. It's Claudia Farrington. We have one, two, three, four, five, six funds. Okay, I counted five, but I could miss one. I have the Tax Assessors Revolving Fund. That's 2082?

0:44:52 Yes. Can I run them to them in order? We're going to reconcile it here. We have Fund 2076, that's Corporations and Trademarks. Okay. 2082, Tax Assessor Revolving Fund. 2103, Financial Services Fund. 2110, Commission of Insurance Fund. 60 51 as the gis uh fund that's the one i missed okay i didn't count that one because that was federal um no not entirely no it's it's local okay i missed that one 60 104 would be the um the card of deeds okay good okay so it's six i just wanted to make sure i had it here now i wanted to ask you because i looked in the budget book and i compared it to what uh is stated here and the one that was alarming to me to tell you the truth is the budget book represented that you had a little deficit in the financial services fund for um monies available for the budget i could tell you what page it is on and if you could explain that to me why they would say that it was on page 21 it's a financial services you had a deficit is here in quotations well in parentheses and that's usually stating a deficit of four hundred twenty seven thousand four hundred ninety dollars and one sense i i don't know how that came about but maybe you could shed some light why the budget book would say that wherein uh your representation uh in your testimony clearly states that you are you are doing good you're doing really good with financial services here um so i'm just wondering what would be that little delta that they are referring to um miss farrington help help give shed some light on that uh good afternoon senator i would have to look at the budget book but in general when they're preparing the budget they pull information from the system and sometimes there's information

0:47:15 that's poll it could be from a prior a prior period in other words everything rolls up in one and sometimes there's a figure or something some outlying number out there and it wasn't anything on a current basis it doesn't mean anything to you per se you understand what i'm saying because some of these funds continue multi-year okay so my my question is not on you necessarily but definitely on finance and how we are reconciling those balances because you represented here at least for yourself you for financial services you have uh uh from actual for 21 minute four of 9 million 9.1 million you have already collected for 2025 up to june 20th 7.9 um almost eight million dollars so i wanted to understand how this could have a deficit in this line i don't have a deficit for financial services fund i can say that okay that's that's okay okay that's good enough for you as long as long as you are looking at it and you know you don't have a deficit i am good now i want to switch uh to corporations and trademarks uh miss johannson johannes i see that you are doing really well um and your projections uh as far as 2026 is 8.5 million are you going to be able to make that and i'm looking at page one of your testimony that was presented 8.5 million almost 9 million and and that's going to be up about 5 million 500 mil 500 000 good afternoon

0:49:11 denise johannes uh director division of corporations and trademarks we're right now on track by the end of this month we will be up to very close to eight million or a little past it um so and after that we got um two more months in the fiscal year okay good uh finally mr chairman i do have another question may i thank you so kindly um for the tax miss johann johannes how many how many uh companies do you have who are registered and operating in the virgin islands that has to provide annual reports to the corporations and trademark uh it is 17 097 corporations limited liability companies and partnerships that's a sizable amount mr chairman i really want to thank you for the time but i would have liked to get one more question in thank you so kindly okay so i have one other question and this is for my nobody gets jealous uh this is for my favorite favorite division and that's of course the tax assessors the property tax um division mr lardom i understand you indicated previously that you have about a hundred million dollars outstanding in property taxes how and what is going to be done to collect that money that's our money we have services we have roads to fix okay we have to help with the hospitals and all of the medical facilities and we have housing we have all of those things we have these bills and we have to pay our hard-working people of the virgin islands our government workers and provide those services in consideration of this one big beautiful bill that we're seeing cuts we need to collect this money what are we doing uh thank you senator

0:51:21 brent lairdam tax collector um as of right now as i mentioned it's about a hundred million dollars that's uh delinquent and that's before the delinquency uh time hits for 2025. it's going to increase when that time hits on august 30th uh we've been doing several things uh we're encouraging for first of all we're communicating better with the public than before and we're encouraging folks to first if you don't have the ability to pay all of your taxes then please do a payment plan a payment plan is going to do a couple of things it's going to freeze your interest and penalties from the state that you start your payment plan as well as it's going to remove you it it would disallow us from sending you to final collection activities whatever kind whether um uh property auctions or or judicial foreclosure and so if if you do a payment plan and

manage that through there's no additional fees there's no additional cost you could even do it online you don't have to come into our offices you can pay like that you know and so education helps and so the more we have the conversation with the public we see that we're beginning to achieve our potential which is what we want to see is a steady flow of collections throughout the year not a high low kind of a thing that okay only when taxes a bill that's when you see a spike and then after that it comes down so we're beginning to see the difference and we're going to continue to work on that same process to educate people and help them to uh reduce their delinquencies and to to to fulfill their debt to the government I thank you so

0:53:16 much mr. later I want to commend you because I remember vividly that you had reported to this body earlier this year that the outstanding was a hundred and twenty five million dollars and now you're down to a hundred million just keep up the good work let's move on and press on regardless thank you so much mr. chairman for the time thank you very much senator college Joseph and the chair will recognize senator ray fonseca has joined us he's a committee member before we go to him real quickly while he's settling um i i know that that mr hannes you had done some work in terms of automating trademarks and cooperation are you satisfied at the level now that your automation is fully completed and speak to how that has benefited your division thank you senator the division of corporations and trademarks started its online implementation system that's available to the public 24 hours a day seven days a week corporations partnerships limited liability companies UCC filers as well as trademarks are all now filing their reports their documents real time with the division when their reports are coming due like the June 30th deadline that just passed persons start receiving their email reminders from January and incrementally three months out six months three months one month out and they're on July 1 are immediately told that they don't have an approved annual report so we are constantly collecting with the email reminders we are also to administratively dissolving entities in accordance with the law if they have one or more years in arrears of not paying their franchise taxes so it's keeping everyone honestly thank you for that

0:55:24 and Acton chief of staff in respect to consumers are they able to pay on make online payment throughout the entire spectrum of LGO for any services they receive Nadia Harrigan acting chief of staff legal counsel yes I believe so there is that option across the board sorry across the board all all of your division you're able to make online payment yes and what form of payments um you accept on your online payments credit card um credit card debit card paypal paypal we're not there anymore we're not there yet all right and when when there's a defect in the system is there a fall over a fall safe that you could go back to the division of finance department of finance to make that payment I know there was a challenge in some instances where there's some difficulties when your system may be down is there a default that we want to make sure that there is always opportunities for individuals to be able to pay online when they want to pay get a minute to leave that computer chances of them coming back is really slim I would have to get back to senator on that okay do you have any um litigation or judgment against the lgo that you're aware of um yes there are there's at least one settlement and we are negotiating or finalizing i should say a second settlement okay and you have the funding and everything to

0:57:10 to be able to address that settlement no for the settlement that is being finalized we would have to ask for an appropriation and for the first settlement it's my understanding that there is funding for that settlement okay the latter of which is would be over a million dollars very well is your petty cash and credit card and everything reconciled and up-to-date I'll let Ms. Farrington answer that question. Good afternoon you said if our credit card credit cards we're not we we only have one credit card we don't have credit cards okay not plural and we have to work on it monthly has to go through the system and Department of Finance. What about petty cash? Currently that's something we're working on we don't really have a function in right now it's something we're transitioning with no impress fund what about impress no i i think from what i recall we had one account that said it's an impressed fund but it's not anything that no kind of money in it and not anything we've done anything within a while we don't have we don't have much of those our our funds go through the system okay at this time the chair will recognize senator ray fonseca Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair, and a special welcome to the office of the Lieutenant Governor. I spent all this morning with the Lieutenant Governor.

0:58:44 We were at the function for the summer internship for the college-level students with the Commissioner of Labor up at the Charlotte Amaya High School. group. Okay, so Lieutenant Governor's Office is one of our main revenue generation in the government and I have to congratulate you on the street naming initiatives. That's going well. We're working on renaming the one road after Dr. Afrol Heath. They're going in. I think you've received the application. Good.

0:59:26 insurance initiatives I remember last year the lieutenant governor launched the new insurance health insurance initiatives that would be available how is that coming and I wanted to get some breakdown on the rates I want to do some comparatives for self insurance in the Virgin Islands because you know one of our main problems in the hospitals is we have a large amount of the population is uninsured and that was a great initiative i wonder if you can give me and some specifics on that good afternoon glendina matthew director of the division of banking insurance and financial regulation i

don't have that information with me i would have to get that from the company the company who is now offering individual health insurance is optimum global and that is through the producer um joe brugo's caribbean risk group so i'll have to get that information for you okay um through the chair i'd like to get that information because um you know we gotta um we gotta we gotta try our best i know that the obamacare issue the virginals opted out of it years ago and um right now a big problem that we have is the uninsured persons presenting to the hospital and in many cases people would like to get insurance but it's so cost prohibitive you know we in the government being that we in this big pool you know it automatically comes out of our check but i think we need to encourage more of the businesses especially the the medium to larger businesses to provide that insurance for for the employees because it it benefits the government overall okay so i wanted to ask you because you know i've been doing some checks here right and um i noticed there's some areas where you can a lot of the recorder of deeds erica um information um i'm sorry calling you by your first name you know we're personal friends so sorry about that um um the recorder of deeds right is online how are we coming along with that uh erica dover erica dover recorder of deeds service saint thomas um it's very um profitable

1:02:14 and we have We have a lot of customers actually using the service and so we have collected a lot of money through that e-recording we call it. Okay, so Ms. Doba, you find that on the Lieutenant Governor, Recorder of Deeds, exactly what's the link? My title?

1:02:45 No, the link to find, you said you are doing some of it. Yes, so you would go to the Lieutenant Governor's website, even if you were to Google Recorder of Deeds St. Thomas, you would get to the same page as if you go to www.ltg.gov.vi. So you can search for that e-recording information, through Googling Recorder of Deeds St. Thomas. Okay. You know, one number that I always like to know, normally I ask Brent Lierdom, the total value of the properties in the Virgin Islands. I noticed it had been going up, I think it was about \$1.4 billion or somewhere close to the last time.

1:03:38 what is that figure now good afternoon senator I'm going to defer to the tax assessor mr. Romney but it's much higher than that okay mr. Romney yes sir Loudon from the tax assessor the total assessed value in the Virgin Islands right now is about, let's see, \$15,359,448,797. Time.

1:04:21 Mr. Chair, if I could just wrap up. So then, Mr. Laram, so based on the law, right, the Virgin Islands, we can Help me here, we can float bonds based on what, 10% of the value? Is that what it is? 10% of the total assessed value of real property in the Virgin Islands. I didn't give you the assessed value, I gave you the value of property in the Virgin Islands. If you want the total assessed value, it would be \$81,516,106.

1:04:57 okay thank you thank you mr chair for the time uh thank you very much senator fonseca acting chief of staff go ahead um yes good afternoon nadia harrigan acting chief of staff legal counsel i'm director of mis is here mr lance mckay and he can respond to your inquiry about um when there's outages whether the service goes to finance if they can pay very well Can you put your name on the record, please?

1:05:26 And while you're speaking of that, there's also some concerns of whether or not you were able to accept MasterCard, American Express, and again, these are citizens that's listening to the hearing that's making these inquiries. Lance McKay, MIS Director for Office of Lieutenant Governor. To the question of, I guess you're talking about redundancy in terms of payments and not having any outages as much as possible when it comes to payment. We have multiple systems in place. Most of these things are regarding internet usage, so we do have multiple internet sources available so we can mitigate those outages as much as possible. But where the question to Massacard, American Express, just speak to what form of payments you are able to accept Right now, for the tax assessor's office, it's mainly Visa, but we are working with the vendor to make sure those other services do come online, perhaps within the next few months, I'm hopeful.

1:06:29 Where the other divisions are concerned, some of them do have those options available. And of course, you can always come to the office directly to make those other forms of payments as well. Thank you for putting that on record. Good. Real quickly, Ms. Glendina Matthews, Attorney Matthews, in regards to the insurance coverage, can you speak to what the lieutenant governor's office is doing in terms of ramping up the offerings, any of the insurance company in the pipeline? You know, we're in the hurricane season, of course, as well as, you know, my colleague spoke about the prohibition of insurance in some instances. Can you speak to what the Lieutenant Governor's Office is doing in that space?

1:07:18 Good afternoon, Glendina. Matthew, Division of Banking, Insurance and Financial Regulation. We have been doing a lot in terms of getting ready for the hurricane season as well as informing consumers as to what is available in the territory. One of the things we have been doing is doing a lot of outreach, meeting with different entities, partnering with different groups, including as recent as within the last maybe month or two, I met with the realtors in the St. Croix district, advising them as to the status of the insurance market. Fortunately for us that the market has stabilized a lot more significant than last year. Last year when we came before you, we had a lot of issues with lack of capacity, persons not

being able to get insurance, especially as it relates to wooden structures. I met with, and when say I am meaning our team met with all our active insurers and all of them have advised us that they have been able to add additional capacity into the market so you shouldn't be seeing some of the issues we had last year in that there's an inability to get insurance coverage there is some limitation with wooden structures but it's not an outright limitation like it was last year so there are companies that are providing coverage for wooden structures so that is a good news in terms of any rate increases we have not received any rate increases last year we our last rate

1:09:22 increase I think might have been in 2024 where we granted a three percent additional rate increase to one of our PNC insurers but since then we haven't received any additional requests for rate increases from our PNC insurers so the good news is we haven't seen any rate increase the good news is also that there is a increase in capacity in the market for those interested in getting homeowners insurance and is that inclusive of construction as well there is some um limitations still with construction more um loan not construction loan um insurance in general but if you if even if you um have you're seeking a construction loan and you uh would like to get insurance to cover that loan there is capacity in the market thank you thank you for that update senator the graph you recognize for your point of information uh thank you mr chair uh tax assessor romney are the time shares here deeded in the territory um so so far yes here's a mic Okay, use the mic.

1:10:40 Speak on the mic. Yes. Tax Assessor Lewandt Romney. Yes. Mandatorily deeded, to be deeded, or just, you don't know? I didn't understand your question. For purposes of being timeshares in the territory, is it mandatory for them to be deeded? We are in a transition process because I think there is a shift in the understanding of what a timeshare is. And so the laws have not caught up with this shift in thinking.

1:11:18 So we are sort of in a transitional period where timeshare is not thought of as real property by the definition of what real property is. So prior to that understanding, they were being taxed as real property. So each timeshare owner had to pay a bill. We're moving towards the consolidation, which also is in the recognition that the real property is, one of the definitions is that it's an immovable. So a timeshare itself is not an immovable because if you own a timeshare, you don't have to use the unit that you bought the time for here in the Virgin Islands.

1:12:01 You can use it somewhere else. No, but we're just based upon are they deeded? Yes. And mandatorily? I can't answer the mandatorily part. Okay, so they deeded, yes. Thank you. Thank you for the time, Mr. Chair. Very well. Thank you. I think that rounds out the round at this point. Any burning questions from my colleagues? If not, I will go to... Yes, Ms. Parenten. Good afternoon, Senator. I just want to bring one thing to attention I we can have a conversation I can with the post auditor the fund for record of deeds it's generally of two hundred thousand dollars and it's showing up as one hundred and forty eight thousand four dollars the difference of 51 996 is for a contract the main contract for that division which is much needed so I just wanted to bring that to your attention um thank you and of course you could definitely have that further discussion with the post auditor so thank you properly documented at this time um acting chief of staff attorney harrigan you may issue your closing remarks at this time thank you senator on behalf of the honorable chogenza a roach esquire lieutenant lieutenant governor of the u.s virgin islands we thank you for providing us this opportunity to support our budget this morning or this afternoon i should say we also would like to thank the amazing managers and supervisors here with me today and all of the employees in the office of the lieutenant governor for your dedication commitment and amazing and tireless work and we will continue and look forward to serving the citizens of the Virgin Islands and I'll be remissed if I didn't end by saying please pay your property taxes thank you thank you very much and again please extend the appreciation to the rank and

1:14:05 file employees of lieutenant governor's office we appreciate and recognize that in fact you're number two wheel on the bus and in providing the revenues that comes into the coffers of the government to the Virgin Islands that we truly appreciate the upward trending and the continued improvement that we're seeing in terms of your collection the projection of 131 131 million dollars Ms. Farrington we look forward to see that numbers continue to grow and where there's opportunities for us to collect we want to make sure that we're making the available resources available to you to make that happen yes Ms. Farrington for your information please please recognize mike three just for your information which may be of interest to you there's a page at the back of the testimony and it gives a profile of the revenue collections from uh 2019 come forward to you know so we wanted to give you that historical perspective i've been paying attention to it and um yes it's good information and i've i've looked at it and i'll continue to look at it because again all we've seen is numbers are going up and which which is very good all right uh so the uh the committee of budget appropriations and finance stands at recess for 15 minutes when we come back we're coming back with the office of the governor Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

1:17:14 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

1:18:44 I love you Thank you.

1:19:44 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

1:21:44 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

1:23:14 Thank you. Thank you.

1:24:14 Oh, my God. my Thank you.

1:25:44 Thank you. Thank you. ¶¶ Thank you. ¶¶ Li lo la la le lo te lo dai, li lo la la le lo te lo dai

1:28:41 Thank you. Thank you. Lilo la la, lilo nelu la, lilo la la, lilo nelu la, oyame.

1:30:11 Thank you. Thank you. so Oh, my God.

1:32:11 so so so Thank you. I love you.

1:34:41 Thank you. Oh, my God. [2 such phrases repeated 8 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

1:38:41 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Oh, my God.

1:40:41 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. The Committee of Budget, Appropriations, and Finance is back on record, out of recess. At this time, Madam Clerk, please call up the item in Block No. 2.

1:42:33 Block No. 2, 1 to 3 p.m., Office of the Governor. invited testifier kevin a williams senior chief of staff this ends the reading of today's agenda mr chair uh thank you very much madam clerk any correspondence to be ready to the record yes mr chair may proceed july 23rd 2025 honorable novelly francis jr chair committee on budget appropriations and finance 36 legislature of the virgin islands capital building st thomas virgin islands 00822 dear chairman francis i'm writing to formally notify you that regrettably i'll be unable to appear before the committee to present testimony regarding the office of the governor's fiscal year 2026 budget in my absence deputy chief of staff kevin a rodriguez will testify on my behalf mr rodriguez is well versed in all matters pertaining to the budget and the office's operational priorities and is fully authorized to respond the committee's inquiries we remain committed to transparency and collaboration as we work together to ensure the effective allocation of resources in service to the people of the virgin islands thank you for your understanding and continued partnership respectfully kevin a williams senior chief of staff this end today's correspondence mr chair thank you very much madam clerk we do have the representatives from the

1:44:22 office of the governor present and seated at the testifiers table and we'll go to them at this time and deputy chief uh kevin rodriguez good afternoon uh good afternoon uh senator may introduce yourself and then the rest of the team um my name is kevin rodriguez deputy chief of staff office of the governor joyce lynn j durant director of business and administration Halladain Davies, Director of Bureau of Economic Research. Michelle. Michelle.

1:44:52 Michelle Francis, Director, Office of Health Information Technology. Antonio Emanuel, Executive Director of Gun Violence Prevention. Julian Henley, Senior ADA Coordinator for the Government of the Virgin Islands. Thank you all very much, and good afternoon. We have anyone on St. Cory? No, Senator. All right, you may proceed with your testimony at this time. Good afternoon, Honourable Senator Novel E. Francis, Jr., Chairman of the Committee on Budget, Appropriation, and Finance, esteemed committee members, fellow senators of the 36th legislature, legislative staff, and members of the public joining us today. I appreciate the opportunity to present before you. I am Kevin A. Rodriguez, Deputy Chief of Staff to Governor Albert Bryan Jr., and it is my privilege to present the fiscal year 2026 budget request for the Office of the Governor on behalf of Chief of Staff Kevin A. Williams Sr. I represent the dedicated team that works daily to advance Governor Albert Bryan Jr. vision for a stronger and more inclusive Virgin Islands.

1:46:06 Joining me are leaders from key divisions under the office of the governor, Joyce Lynn Durant, Director of Business and Administration, Michelle Francis, Director of Office of Health Information Technology, Antonia Emanuel, Director of Office of Gun Violence Prevention, Dr. Haldeen Davis, Director of the Bureau of Economic Research and Julian Henley, Territorial American with Disabilities Act Coordinator. The governor's authority established by the revised Agonic Act of 1954, the Elective Governors Act of 1968, and the Virgin Islands Code Title II and III empowers him to oversee the executive branch and ensure effective law enforcement across the territory. In Governor Bryan's second term, our administration remains steadfast in promoting inclusive economic growth, enhancing public safety, modernizing government operations, and expanding equitable access to essential services. The Office of the Governor serves as the central hub for these efforts, coordinating policy, overseeing agencies, and fostering collaboration among federal and local partners. We directly manage and support several high-impact initiatives through the Bureau of Economics Research, the Office of Health Information Technology, the Office of Gun Violence Prevention, and the ADA Coordinators Office. data-driven planning digital health equity violence prevention and accessibility our team set

strategies our team set strategic direction and ensures daily operations align with the administration's core priorities economic development health care public safety education and community resilience the The fiscal year 2026 budget reflects these goals and supports the talented professionals serving the people of the Virgin Islands with integrity and purpose. It also underscores our continued investment in modernization, historical preservation,

1:48:40 and civic engagement. Notably, we commission the official portrait of former Governor John P. DeYoung, Jr., and plan to do the same for former Governor Kenneth E. Mapp, ensuring their leadership is permanently memorialized, as was done for former Governor Roy Lesnar-Syder and Governor Charles Wesley Turnbull. This is a part of our broader effort to preserve the territory's legacy of leadership.

1:49:13 We are also undertaking essential repairs and improvements at government house facilities across St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John to preserve their historical and operational integrity. These efforts include more remediation, long overdue air conditioning, repairs, upgrades to audiovisual equipment, and FEMA-funded restoration projects scheduled to begin as early as November 2025. Recent infrastructure upgrades include the modernization of our internal phone system on St. Croix to strengthen continuity of operations and interdepartmental communication. To support data-informed governance, we welcome Dr. Haldene Davies as the new Director of the Bureau of Economics Research. Continuing our commitment to community engagement, we also hosted a variety of non-profit and cultural events at government house locations across three islands. These events include the annual Memorial Day Laying Ceremony, Division of Personnel Ethics Training, Virgin Islands Police Department Peace Officer Graduation, U.S.

1:50:37 army 250th anniversary cake cutting ceremony and the territorial girl scout gala just to name a few these collective efforts reflect the core values of this administration preserving history improving operational efficiency promoting integrity and building public trust as we present our fiscal year 2026 budget we remain focused on delivering results expanding access to services and moving the virgin islands forward with these priorities accomplishments and initiative in mind i now turn to the fiscal year 2026 budget proposal which outlines the resources necessary to sustain and expand the vital work of the office of the governor and its divisions today we will highlight the budget the major components of the governor fiscal 2026 budget requests the financial resources requested are required to fund our mandatory costs and plan initiative for the central operation of the office of the governor the bureau of economic research the office of gun violence prevention and the office of health information technology the office of the governor's fiscal year 2026 general fund budget of 12 million eight hundred and twelve thousand four hundred and ninety four dollars include eleven million four hundred and sixty six thousand one hundred and ninety six dollars of funding for the office of the governor seven hundred and three thousand ninety two dollars for the bill of economic research and six hundred

1:52:33 and forty three thousand two hundred and six dollars for the office of gun violence prevention. Additionally, \$1,275,000 is requested for miscellaneous and special activities and \$300,000 is requested for the Tourism Revolving Fund for a total of fiscal year 2026 funding requests of \$14,387,494. The proposed budget for the Office of the Governor for fiscal year 2026 amount to 14 million 387 thousand four hundred and ninety four dollars this total includes one million two hundred and seventy five thousand dollars in miscellaneous and special appropriated funds three hundred thousand dollars from the tourism revolving fund and 12 million eight hundred and twelve thousand four hundred and ninety four dollars allocated from the general fund currently the office of the governor employs a total of 96 employees with 80 field position and 16 vacancies personnel costs personnel services for fiscal year 2026 personnel costs are estimated to be six million six hundred and two thousand two hundred and ninety two dollars which represent fifty one point five percent of the proposed budget these personal calls are for eighty full-time fill position and sixteen vacant position funded at fifty percent by general fund this position are distributed as follows fill position governor house on St. Thomas has 35 employees the battery on St. John has four employees government house on St. Croix has 29 employees the Bureau of Economic Research has four employees office of gun violence has seven employees, and the Office of Health Information Technology has one employee on St. Croix with one shared administrative staff. Vacant positions. The Office of the Governor has 13 funded vacant

1:54:58 positions. The Bureau of Economic Research has two funded vacant positions, and the Office of Gun Violence has one funded vacant position. We anticipate filling six of these vacancies in the next 30 days with the others to follow these indicated these dedicated professionals are responsible for the daily execution of the mission of the governor's office french benefits employee french benefits account for two million six hundred and forty thousand \$5,576, which is 21.6% of our overall budget, amounting to 42% of the personnel costs.

1:55:50 Fringe benefit covers employees' retirement contribution, workers' compensation premium, social security contribution, or federal insurance contribution, which is FICA, Medicare, and health insurance premiums. Supplies. The request of \$436,100 for supplies will fund the purchase of operating, maintenance, consumable office supplies, food and catering services, minor tools and office equipment, replacement costs of uniform for our housekeeping, maintenance, and

security staff. Other services and charges. The budget category described as other services and charges amount to \$2,179,459 or 17% of our budget. These projected expenditures are broken down as follows, \$140,000. This is broken down for the repair and maintenance of equipment and administrative repair based on traditional expenditure, minor building repairs, landscaping and exterminating services at a cost of \$118,000 and other repair at cost of two hundred twenty two thousand dollars excuse me two hundred and thirty one thousand seven hundred dollars this is used for the rental of the DC and local office spaces rental cost of copiers postage and other equipment rental costs of 151 thousand seven hundred dollars and equipment rental of eighty thousand dollars five hundred and sixty thousand dollars is for routine

- 1:57:59 monthly professional services contract for five hundred and forty five thousand dollars and security service is in the amount of fifteen thousand dollars necessary to augment security staff during special events \$32,120 is for the printing and binding of documents and reports \$10,120 and transportation expenses to include shipping of goods and services between Ireland \$22,000. \$383,500 is for monthly communication cost for telephone T1 line internet and conference call services \$308,500 and advertising and promotion via radio and printing media, \$75,000. \$369,500 is for inter and off-island travel expenses for the governor, his security detail and support staff, \$203,200. Purchase of ball tickets for travel within the territory eighty thousand five hundred dollars cash advance fifty thousand eight hundred dollars and to facilitate training initiative thirty five thousand dollars four hundred and sixty two thousand six hundred and thirty nine dollars is for all miscellaneous items not otherwise classified in the ERP system. Bank charges, \$2,500. Community events and other
- 2:00:01 initiatives of the governor, \$460,139. Utilities. Our utility budget requests of \$514,000 will provide for electricity and water consumption for the governor's office and BER the expenditures of these funds will be managed through the single-payer utility fund at the department of finance capital outlay our capital budget requests of 321 000 will provide for replacement costs of major office equipment, the purchase of two new vehicles, generator and air conditioning repairs at Government House St. Croix, and other minor renovations to Government House on St. John at the Battery. Miscellaneous and special activities. \$1,275,000 is requested for FY26 to cover expenses for miscellaneous annual activities and events to include USVI BVI Friendship Day, USVI Puerto Rico Friendship Day, activities in both districts, Emancipation Day activities, Government Access Channel, Office of Health Information Technology Exchange, and Office of Gun Violence Prevention for operational expenses, and the Virgin Islands Virtual Information System. Funding for Governor's annual activities will cover activities for the Children's Christmas Party and Reading Challenge territory-wide.
- 2:01:54 Bureau of Economic Research. The governor's budget proposal for Bureau of Economic Research includes \$1,003,092, comprised of \$703,092 for the general fund and \$300,000 from the Tourism Revolving Fund. BIA has a staff of four and is in the process of recruiting two additional staff members. The Bureau of Economic Research is the Virgin Islands primary source of reliable quality-assured statistics that support informed decision-making, planning and economic development across the territory. territory. BER provides data to both public and private sectors to assist with policy development, grant applications, economic forecasting, and performance evaluation. Recent publications available on BER websites include 2022 Economic Sentence Report, 2022 Gross Domestic Product report 2024 consumer index pricing report 2022 to 2023 visitor exit survey 2022 blue economy and living wage studies and 2023 economic review and hotel occupancy report BAR leverages applied research and diverse data sources to monitor the economy, inform development and evaluate the impact of policies and initiative while serving as a trusted resource for government, developers and investors.
- 2:03:56 Its mission is to provide timely, accurate economic data to support public and private sector decisions with a vision of transforming the territory's planning and development through accessible, accountable insight. BR's core priorities include strengthening institutional capacity with modern institutional tool and training attracting and retaining skilled professionals leveraging advanced technology for data collection and dissemination enhancing public access to user-friendly visualized statistics and collaborating with regional and global statistical offices for best practices Building on these core priorities, BER has identified several key goals and projects for the upcoming fiscal year that will advance its mission, strengthen data-driven planning, and support sustainable economic growth across the territory.
- 2:05:06 B, our key goals and projects include expanding data collection on accommodation, facilitating staff development in economic and forecasting tool, update the comprehensive economic development strategy, complete the household income and expenditure survey, Analyze the economic impact of GBI operations and recovery efforts Support investment promotion via data back pitch deck Evaluate and recommend government fee structure Conduct a study of government GBI territorial health insurance viability Propose public-private asset modernization strategies Identify new revenue generation opportunities using economic data Partner with USVI-EDA to pursue AEDO and professional certifications

Collaborate and reference Vision 2040 And standardize economic analysis model across agencies BAR remains committed to delivering accountable economic intelligence and fostering collaboration for the territory's future growth office office of gun violence prevention the governor's budget proposal for the office of gun violence prevention of \$868,206 includes \$643,206 from the general fund and \$225,000 from the miscellaneous fund for operational expense.

- 2:07:07 The Office of the Governor, the Office of Gun Violence Prevention, remains steadfast in its mission to reduce gun-related violence and promote healing across the Virgin Islands. Through a comprehensive approach grounded in prevention, intervention, education, and support, OGVP works directly with individuals and communities to stop violence before it starts and provide vital assistance in its aftermath. Despite a tragic weekend in June marked by multiple shootings, the overall rate of gun violence in the territory has continued to decline. This encouraging trend reflects the impact of GOVP's sustained effort and a strong partnership with law enforcement, government agencies, non-profit organizations, faith-based groups, and private sector allies. Violence prevention and reduction remain central to OGVP's work.
- 2:08:24 Over the past years, the office has delivered anti-violence and anti-bullying presentations to more than 3,500 students across the territory. These sessions, held in schools and youth center spaces, focus on early prevention and equip young people with tools to manage conflict, resolve disputes, and make safe decisions. Additionally, more than 200 professionals and community members have participated in OGVP's safety training workshop on topics such as workplace, violence prevention, active shooter response, conflict resolution, de-escalation, and procedural justice. Community engagement is another pillar of OGVP's strategy.
- 2:09:21 In collaboration with the Department of Health and Department of Human Services, OGVP has partnered with multiple wellness day offering resident access to trauma information care, mental health screening, and community resources. These outreach efforts not only support healing, but also build trust between service provider and the community they serve. Youth empowerment and education are key areas of focus.
- 2:09:59 OGVPs support at-risk students through the citizen leadership curriculum and the in-school suspension program. both of which emphasize mentorship, responsibility, and self-awareness. More than 75 families have participated in parenting classes designed to improve communication, access, address behavioral challenges, and strengthen family dynamics. dynamics ogvp also operates after school programs in partnership with the virgin islands housing authority currently serving over 50 students to further promote positive alternative the office has organized youth baseball outings and provides summer camp sponsorship creating safe enriching environment for young people outside of school hours ogvp's role extend beyond prevention and education it plays a direct and compassionate role in responding to violence in 90% of the homicide homicide cases OGVP survivor engagement specialist has provided direct support to victims and their families assisting with crisis intervention counseling referrals and long-term follow-up meanwhile OGVP's term team of trained violence interrupters has successfully de-escalated more than a dozen high-risk situations while where violence was imminent these outline interventions have helped prevent retaliatory acts and save lives
- 2:12:09 cross-agency collaboration as amplifies OGVPs reach and effectiveness by By working closely with agencies such as the Virgin Islands Housing Authority, Department of Health and the Department of Human Services, OGVP ensures services are delivered efficiently, equitably and in alignment with community needs. Looking ahead, OGVP is committed to expanding its impact.
- 2:12:44 The office plan to host more than 100 violence prevention events, broaden its presence in schools and neighborhoods, enhance youth enrichment activities, strengthen services for victims and survivors, and increase training access for both professional and the general public. While the path to ending gun violence is complex and evolving, OGVP's work continues to yield meaningful results through evidence-based strategies, strong partnership, and unwavering dedication to community well-being. The Office of Gun Violence Prevention remains a critical force in creating a Virgin Islands where all residents can live in safety dignity and peace office of health information technology the office of health information technology currently operates solely from the office of the governor's general fund to include four hundred thousand dollars from the operational expense fund and in support of the implementation of the virgin islands health information exchange established in 2021 by executive order the office of information technology leads the modernization of health i.t system across the territory OHIT's mission is to deliver innovative digital health solution that improve care and wellness for all Virgin Islanders.
- 2:14:30 We envision a connected, efficient health system that enhances both individual and population outcomes. OHID's strategic plan focuses on empowering patients and providers through digital tools, building a secure, interoperable IT infrastructure, developing a skilled local workforce to sustain growth. To support these strategic priorities, OHIT has established a set of core objectives that guide implementation efforts and ensure meaningful, measurable progress across the healthcare ecosystem. OHIT core objective include modernization of health care delivery to better data use strengthening interoperatively across providers and systems shaping health IT policy and legislation supporting providers

with grants training and best practices managing the USVI health information exchange and expanding care across for vulnerable population with these objective as our foundation or it has made significant progress over the past year through key initiative and partnership across the territory key achievements hosted a third hosted the third annual digital health summit with 250 plus attendees and legislative engagement on the healthcare data utility secure 1.3 million dollars in federal funding to support EHR upgrades I h ie connectivity and disaster recovery supported a HRSA grant for health telehealth tools at st. Thomas East End Medical Center

2:16:54 collaborated with the USVI his hospital board to develop an upgraded electronic medical records strategy and created a blueprint for a comfortable healthcare infrastructure focusing on sustainability telehealth integration and cost reduction building on these accomplishment ohit's goal for 2026 focus on advancing key initiative that strengthen health i.t infrastructure expanding access and supporting long-term sustainability ohit goals and projects include advocate for hdu legislation to support a modern secure health system expand ph it4 vi training with howard university to address it workforce gaps advance the accountable healthcare infrastructure blueprint which will be implement a unified HR system across hospitals, connect agencies and providers to the HIE, establish telehealth nodes to expand access and deploy cross-agency care management tools. OH remains committed to transforming the territories health system through technology, care more connected accessible and effective to all ADA Americans with Disability Act the office of the territorial Americas with Disability Act

2:18:50 coordinates ensure coordinator ensures equal access for all Virgin Islanders and visitors by promoting inclusive practices and recognizing the diverse need of individuals with disabilities our mission is to advance accessibility our vision is to empower people to education awareness and advocacy ADA core functions the office provide daily guidance to residents business agencies on accommodation legal rights and ADA compliance core duties include handling inquiries conducting site visits and evaluation delivering training and coordinating into agencies effort the office also responsive federal updates and lead accessibility initiative across government ADA recent achievement include development of a GVI employee accommodation form, ADA parking placard, and deaf and hard-to-hearing visor card. Free disability IDs through the Bureau of Motor Vehicle. Expand of the Accessible Beaches Initiative at Megan's Bay, Smith Bay, and Kramers Park.

2:20:33 ADA upgrades at Limburg Bay and other public spaces, 508 training with FEMA, Peace Officer ADA training, and annual ADA Expo, launch of a centralized ADA webpage, and successful ADA 35th anniversary celebration held on Wednesday, July 15th on St. Thomas and on Thursday, July 17th on St. Croix. ADA ongoing projects, weekly site visit and calls for dpn for with dpnr doh dspr and others ada 508 training for pios it staff and ada coordinators and training for new taxi drivers sensitivity session for public private sectors ADA FYI 26 goals and projects digital accessibility training for government web developers specialized training for ADA coordinators and contractors and parking compliance guidelines and enforcement in collaboration with DPNR. As demand increase and potential federal cuts to disability programs loom, the office plays a critical and crucial role in maintaining accessibility throughout the territory. Its efforts are

2:22:26 key to advancing a barrier-free USVI where all individuals can live work and thrive in conclusion mr. chair as we conclude our final our fiscal year 2026 budget presentation I want to take a moment to acknowledge the heart of this office the individuals whose steadfast dedication quiet sacrifices and daily commitment to public service makes all of our progress possible this past year we experienced moments of great loss with our government house family in 2025 we said goodbye to miss linda joseph our cherished receptionist who answered every call with patience poise and grace her absence is deeply felt and her memory continues to resonate in the way we serve our community In 2024, we also lost Mr. Gene Lee Cruz, our dedicated executive security officer.

2:23:54 Gene Lee was not just a protector of the office. He was a loyal, confident, a courageous professional, and a respective colleague. His dedication to the safety of our leadership and staff embodied quiet strength and integrity, and his legacy remains part of the very fabric of our team. we also celebrate the distinguished retirement of two long-time employees whose career leave an indelible legacy of service mr bernard benny gibbs and mr mario rodriguez together represent decade of institutional knowledge dependability and pride in public service their contribution have helped shape the culture and continuity of this administration and we extend our deepest gratitude for their years of service and mentorship amid these transition we also lift up and celebrate excellence within our team we proudly recognize our employees of the year for their outstanding contribution and extraordinary performance mr. Sylvester Warner represent the st. Thomas st. John district whose professionalism and attention to detail reflect the highest standard of of the office mr. Jacqueline Davis from St. Croix district whose leadership dedication and initiative continue to move the mission of our office forward with purpose and passion these achievements are a testament to the caliber of individuals who serve the

- 2:26:01 people of the Virgin Islands with distinction each and every day as we look ahead to fiscal year 2026 we remain steadfast in our mission to preserve the dignity of government strengthening our infrastructure and uplift our people projects such as mold remediation critical ac repairs and fema funded improvements are already in motion and reflect our resolve to maintain safe, resilient, and functional government facilities.
- 2:26:45 The office of the governor stands not just as a seat of executive authority, but as a symbol of stability, stewardship, and service. With this budget, we continue our commitment to honoring the past. responding to the needs of the present and preparing boldly for the future. On behalf of our entire team, I thank you for your continued partnership and your thoughtfulness, thoughtful consideration of this budget request. We are ready to respond to your questions and look forward to working together to build a stronger, more inclusive territory.
- 2:27:38 Thank you very much, Mr. Kevin Rodriguez, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Office of the Governor. I too want to join in commending your Employees of the Year, Mr. Sylvester Warner and Ms. Jacqueline Davis, and commend them for their above and beyond contribution to government service and public service and the whole. Have you received all of your allotments for 2025 thus far? Yes, Mr. Chair. Have there been any reduction in any of that allotment?
- 2:28:09 I would yield to our business director. Senator Joycelyn Durant, we have not received any reduction. No reductions. Have you received any federal funds to help to subsidize any of the divisions that fall under the office of the governor? No. There are two federal funds that are managed to OMB, but not directly to the office of the governor. Good. Vendor's payment. How are you in your vendor's payment? How much do you owe?
- 2:28:48 We're doing pretty good. I am proud to say that the director of our business office is very diligent in ensuring that we're up to date with our vendor's payment. so is it your testimony that all of your vendors payment at this point is within the 30 days correct yes very well what is your what is your vacancy challenges i see that you have a number of vacancies what are the challenges in filling these positions um well we did have a vacancy challenge at our vivis uh we did identify uh a person to hold that position however uh that person um declined the position and now i'm happy to announce that we do have someone that we've selected uh to to do our vivis so i'm i'm happy for that any other areas you have several um vacancies um within your shop and miss durant will tell you about uh the six vacancies that we have within our shop Doran speaking. Yes, we have six vacancies. We actually have six positions that are coming on board within the next few weeks or before the end of this fiscal year. So we are diligently working and trying to fill most of our vacancies. So they're coming into the fourth quarter? Yes. Yes. Yes. And we're hopeful to fill the balance in short order.
- 2:30:21 All right. What about all of the storm damages under the facilities for the governor's office? Have those been completed? No. We're diligently working on repairing. We had some air-condition issues, and so we're changing from regular air-condition into a dry vac, which would help reduce the mold. Which facility? Which facility? That would be on St. Croix. Which facility?
- 2:30:50 Our government house in St. Croix. Government house in St. Croix. Yes. All right. What about your Frederick State office? Yes, we do have, and Ms. Durant can give you the cost. We do have the cost for the, to the federal, to Ms. Durant, I'll let you present. We did receive some federal funding for the Frederick State office. Arthur Abel Complex and for some renovations at the Christianstead, but those are still under FEMA review. That's 2.4 million dollars.
- 2:31:23 What about the St. Thomas Government House and any other facility that comes under the governor's office in St. Thomas? Yes, we have identified a vendor through the bid process for the St. Thomas Simmons building that's the old business office and for the legal council building and that's two point zero nine million dollars and that contract is currently property procurement for development the battery on St. John the battery on St. John we had minor repairs that we did complete this this year as far as a major capital improvement we have not done any major repairs on St. John at this time I'll open up the floor to my colleagues and then I'll come back Senator Valle you recognize your five minutes thank you mr. chair and again good afternoon to the people out of region islands on mr rodriguez on page eight of your testimony you said uh these personal costs are for 80 full-time field position and 16 vacant positions funded at 50 percent you fill in six of those positions now yes so in your budget are those six positions represented as a hundred percent in the budget that you submitted yes uh yes so why did you make the statement that the positions are funded at 50 percent uh the remain uh the remaining positions are funded at uh 50 but i yield to ms durant and she can okay just the logic though if yeah if it's
- 2:33:17 50 that means half of the fiscal year yeah so if your intention is to fill the positions by october first then all the positions need to be funded at a hundred percent. Ms. Durant? Senator, we do have 10 positions that are budgeted and they are at 100 percent. Six positions we do have, we currently working on onboarding the individuals and the other four we're working to get them. I'm not worried about the onboarding process, I'm worried about what's in the budget well what is the funding level in the budget if you have six positions in the budget of 50 percent then you're saying that those

individuals are not coming out until the end of march those six positions yes march of next year okay and the 10 positions and the 10 positions 100 yes okay so then the the testimony needed to to be switched a bit you're asking for a million increase in your overall budget?

- 2:34:22 Yes, Senator. What's the justification? The justification is that we added two additional positions over last year, approximately \$100,000. We had some vacancies that were filled during this year. One minute, two positions in which department? Those two positions... The Office of the Governor. Okay. And what's the amount?
- 2:34:56 One was \$55,000 and the other one was \$45,000. Okay. And they were added this fiscal year? They were added this year. And you were able to accommodate those positions with the budget that you presently have? That's correct, Senator. Okay. So I'm asking for the increase. If you're able to accommodate it with the budget you have, then why is there an increase for next year for those same two positions? We did have some vacancies that was filled at higher salaries and we also had some promotions in house. Okay, so those vacancies that are filled at higher salaries, those salaries are going into effect for the next fiscal year or they're in effect now?
- 2:35:35 They're in effect now. Okay, so I'm going back to that. If your present budget that you have, which is 13 million, 12,166, is that your present budget? For 2025? Yeah, for FY25. Yes. Okay. If you added these positions in FY25, and your present budget is able to sustain those positions, then you have to have a next justification for the million dollars. The period, if they came on for 75% of the time, then we know you have to put in 25% more for FY26. But if they're being accommodated right now in your present budget, then you need to be able to break out exactly what the million dollar increase is for. Because right now, with a smaller budget, with the 13 million, you're able to maintain the increase, you're able to hire those individuals, so the million dollars got to represent something. How does the million add up?
- 2:36:35 We had seven positions became vacant this year with resignations, two retirements, and so we had some vacancy savings with those positions. To add to my argument, those are funded positions, but I'm sure my minority colleague is going to drill down a bit more on that. One minute. Yes, I was hoping it would happen. Officer Gun Violence, Survivor Engagement Specialist, what are the qualifications for that position?
- 2:37:11 The Survivor Engagement Specialist person has a- Please give your name. I'm sorry. Antonio Emanuel, the Executive Director of Gun Violence Prevention. The Survivor Engagement Specialist specializes in dealing with grief. No, no, no. I'm not asking what they specialize in. What are the qualifications for somebody who wants that position? They have to have the ability to deal with people that are dealing with grief. The current survivor engagement specialist, both of them on both islands, are grief specialists. What I'm looking for, that person has a counseling degree, psychology, any and anybody can't hold that type of position. Matter of fact, I see the position as one that needs to be on the human services, that's able to provide all of the surrounding services but it can't be anyone that's going to be a survivor engagement specialist they have to be somebody that is trained that has a requisite education to provide those type of skills so in the job spec do you have clear qualification requirements for somebody that is going to hold a position In the job specs, we don't, there's no, no, there's no degree that you have to have, but both of my people that are in that position have degrees, and they're certified and grief specialists.
- 2:38:36 So, to answer your question, I probably should review the job spec. These are new positions that I'm seeing in the budget? No, these aren't new. These were in the original legislation that you won't read on. New funded positions in the FY26 budget. Ms. Durant? No, those are not new positions.
- 2:39:04 Look on page 14 of the post audit report and I'll come to post audit. Page 14, survivor engagement specialist, new, new, saying that you have individuals in those positions right now? Yes sir. That's an error. That's an error. Yes. So in your office how many individuals do you have? We have two survivor engagement specialist, two violence interrupters, one community outreach person, and I guess our administrative assistant. So you have eight individuals in the office? Seven. And what is the degree background of the survivor engagement specialist? Why is it a degree? What is the degree that those individuals hold business management a doctorate in theology and my I don't know I'm not sure the agreements to skepple has but I'm sure he has a degree probably in theology as well both of my surviving games as our active pastors and ministers we're not running that church I was asking in terms of in engagement specialists and having the requisite background in counseling or psychology in order to hold those positions I mean I'm you're saying business administration to be a survivor engagement specialist I would yield and come back thank you so much mr. chair thank you very much senator BLA you wanted to further discuss the qualifications or you're good on what you provide us about uh at this time the chair will recognize
- 2:41:01 senator hubert project you recognize for your five minutes uh thank you very much mr chair pleasant good afternoon listening to you and audience colleagues my staff central staff and testifiers um mr rodriguez good to see you again um just um curious about some of the activities that was um budgeted like uh the governor's uh event for spending i see 460

budgeted miscellaneous special events what what's that about i said something about a children's parade That's over or under what we typically budget for activities like this.

2 : 42 : 03 While you're looking for that, my next question would be in reference to credit card charges. Our post-audit shows \$300 on \$4,437.23 in finance charges for credit card fees. Why are these so high? I'm just curious. Senator Durant speaking. That is the total cost for all the credit cards at the Office of the Governor. What happened is finance have lumped all credit card use under one object code and so it looks like a lot but it's spent over whether supplies or whatever travel expenses or whatever the card holder used it for office supplies. But all the expenses are lumped into one object code.

2 : 43 : 04 Do you reconcile those accounts? Yes, Senator. How often? Every month. Okay. All right. Any luck on that yet, Mr. Rodriguez? Yeah, you mentioned the Governor's Reading Challenge. Correct. Yes, that is \$75,000. Okay. And what about the Reading Challenge and what else is in there? Christmas? yeah the governor's uh children christmas event so how are we over under here from the prior year we work within our means and also to augment that we also raise money too for the for the governor's christmas okay children events all right so let's talk about your dc office um You're paying a lease of, what, \$70,700 every year? Is that... How many people occupy that office space?

2 : 44 : 02 There's one person, but it's also occupied when we have staff travel to D.C. Okay. Okay. Well, I assume that's the best we could do in D.C. Well, Senator, I just want to bring some clarity to that. That office is in the governor's row, where every state has an office within that establishment. So it's not that we can go outside and we just have to have it right there in the governor's row where we have, what, 51 and the territories located.

2 : 44 : 40 Let's talk about training and travel costs. You got \$369,500 compared to your prior year. Where are we with that this 2026 year? I would yield to Ms. Durant. Okay. In the testimony, you're talking about a testimony? Yes, ma'am. um three let me see okay three hundred and sixty nine thousand five hundred that's one minute for off-island um travel for the governor and his security staff we have budgeted at two hundred and three thousand two hundred dollars and bulk ticket um for inter-island travels is We're requesting \$80,500 and cash advances for those travelers, \$50,800. That totals the \$369,500.

2 : 45 : 44 Okay. In terms of the repayment of the salary that the governor was paid recently, was that reimbursed? Is that reflected in the next? Senator, as the Governor indicated publicly that he has reversed his salary increase. We have put in a request to finance department to provide us with a calculation of those deductions and then once we receive those calculations, then we would then effectuate the deduction on every payment.

2 : 46 : 20 All right. Time. Thank you very much for the time, Mr. Chair. That was quick. Um, thank you very much. Uh, thank you very much, Senator Frederick, before we go on to the next Senator, which will be Senator, um, I wanted to ask you, I guess the, the director of administrative services, what is your projected vacancy savings in FY 2025? Any idea?

2 : 46 : 53 Current. Yes. Our current savings is in excess of \$500,000. In excess of \$500,000. And that's mostly all of... Okay, yeah. That is inclusive of fringe as well, or not? Yes, including fringe. Including fringe. Okay, all right. Thank you. Senator Anghel Balkezi recognized for your... He's not there.

2 : 47 : 24 Dr. Maurice James, you're recognized for your five minutes. Thank you, sir. Good afternoon, testifiers, good afternoon, colleagues, staff, everyone in and outside of the room. I want to start by following up on the questions that my colleague had about the survivor victim specialists. How many survivors have been, I guess the word isn't treated, have been counseled by over the years that this position has been in effect? Almost 90% of victims that have been involved in a shooting have been engaged with our survivor engagement specialist okay listen to the question I'm gonna make my questions really really tight nowadays because I'm noticing I'm you I'm hearing vague answers like soon and sooner and 90% how many many means a number of victims have been served by the survivor victim specialists the number of survivors have been not 90% of 90% is not an answer I'm sorry so maybe you can look back yet we're number we had 23 homicides this year this year so far we've served 20 so when you okay I don't really want to do this but I'm gonna have to do it you said you had 23 homicides 23 homicides yes and 20 survivors so when you are so

2 : 49 : 41 difficult for me today. The survivors include whom? Spouses, family members, immediate family members. Who do you try to reach in terms of the survivor of a victim? Do you try to expand to beyond the immediate family members or is it spouse is it children i just i'm just trying to get an idea of the people you serve that's what i'm trying to do anybody directly related to the victim also uh also members of the neighborhood where it occurred uh co-workers um friends um we try to extend if there's um like an incident in a major housing community we follow up with with other with follow-ups to the cows entire housing community yeah that's that's why I'm asking too because if for example it's if it is a workplace do you coordinate then or if it's a school do you coordinate with in in terms of the workplace let's say human services or um you know school counselors right i'm just trying to for example we had a shooting work for example we had an incident at woodson middle school and we went to the school we coordinated with human services and the

health department offering and connecting them with counseling staff counseling student counseling parents counseling um anybody that was even even vicariously affected by that event Okay. So in terms of your records, which is confidential, of course, when you say 20,

2 : 51 : 32 you meant that they were specifically assisted by your specialists, correct? That family, the surviving families, yes. Okay. Thank you. I just wanted to be clear exactly on what was happening in that space. with regards to the the leases the governor's leases for the property and st croix zeffels enterprises office space how many uh employees are occupying that space we have a total of around 12 employees 12 employees from the office of the governor Yes. And then we also use that facility, if a person, personal travel from St. Thomas doing business in Frederick said they would utilize that office also.

2 : 52 : 33 Okay. And with respect to the Office of the Governor's DC office space, you said there's only one full-time employee in that office? that is correct okay thank you the you know i i don't i don't have any um more questions and i and i know that the um this is this is making a delight today i know that the chair can't ask about the succession plan thank you bye Of course I can, of course I can, that's my cousin right now, real quickly before we go to the point, I see in your testimony you spoke about the commissioning of the portrait for governor john pd young but which by the way i think is long overdue but is the funding that you have available because you spoke about also doing the same for former governor kennedy map is the funding sufficient to support both of these portraits uh senator um the funding may be sufficient but we know with costs and because there's going to be new portrait we have not yet negotiated that cost for a governor map so i'm i'm definitely made i would say that it would probably be a little higher so this is this amount will have to be amended at some point yeah but i

2 : 54 : 22 i think we could work within our means to try to make sure that we have sufficient money to cover that portrait yeah that's why i'm not even mentioning the amount because obviously i guess you're still negotiating the amount so yes yeah all right i just thought it was a little low um you know especially to do two of them no well the first one is is the amount but we have to negotiate the second one with oil and costs we are waiting a proposal for the second portrait okay understood uh so the frederick you recognize for your point of information thank you very much mr chair mr rodriguez um in reference to the utility um I know you guys are part of the single payer programs here, right?

2 : 55 : 05 Yes, sir. Okay. So there's a variance of 66,328 with the post audit versus your numbers. Can you explain that variance for us, please? Durant speaking. Senator, while reviewing the post-audit report, I realized that \$66,328 is actually the capital outlay cost for the Office of Gun Violence. It was just misplaced in the wrong section. Okay.

2 : 55 : 44 Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Appreciate the clarification. Thank you very much, Senator Hibbert Frederick. We'll recognize Senator Duane DeGraff, you'll recognize for your five minutes of this. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon colleagues, good afternoon testifiers. How many employees do you have in the Office of the Governor? Mr. Durant? Durant speaking, do you want it broken down by Ireland, sir? No, just give me a total number.

2 : 56 : 15 We have, for the Office of the Governor, 69 employees. 69 so and we have seven um in the office of gun the office of gun violence prevention and four employees in the office uh in the bureau of economic research okay um okay can i have the How many employees do you have under 35,000? Senator, we have four employees. Four.

2 : 56 : 48 How many vacancies do you have total, is it? We have a total of 16, and we're going to be filling six in a short order. 16 from the office of the governor alone, or to include the other two offices? Yes, include the divisions. Okay. so how many in after gun violence vacancies one how many in BR BR two okay how many vacancies under 35,000 four senator no vacancies no you mean employees under 35,000 I got that we have four employees the vacancies of the 16 vacancies how many are under 35 oh no we don't we don't have any vacancies under 35 000.

2 : 57 : 44 has anyone received wage increases in 25 this year uh no but where my colleague mentioned um ms durand said senator with durand speaking we did have five employees that was promoted into a different position so they got an increase with that oh okay okay no but but but no increases outside of that you have gs employees no no all exempt employees all exempt right okay so no one received wage increases that's correct okay and for those five who are promoted are they owed any retro no senator no okay now um the office of gun violence prevention um You have one vacancy, seven employees.

2 : 58 : 39 Okay, I would like to get your actuals in terms of expenditures for you, BER, and the Office of the Governor. I'd like to get the expenditures for personnel fringe. You probably would just have to any utilities and all of that to go get them, or Ms. Durand, will you be able to give me everyone's own? I will be able to give you everyone. Actually, it was provided. Okay, but I want the actual as of, what's the latest you have?

- 2:59:11 June 30th. Okay, so only up to June 30th you have. Now, from, you look at post audit report page six it is, where we have the funding flow. i just said as of June 30 2025 the office allotment to date is nine million three sixty eight seven fifty five correct the actual amount is um nine million eight thirty five eight fifty one seventy so so so that that that's why you need to get the updated because i i'm going based on what the post audit report has so what you say the correct numbers are nine million eight hundred thirty-five thousand eight hundred fifty one dollars seventy cents okay and one minute what what is the the unallotted balance presently two months of of the the 13 million if if if you have the by June you have the nine we have 10 months allotment released and two months to go right August and September so i i want you to tell me it because i i i want to do my calculation all right yeah I didn't write out that amount okay so just subtract the name from the okay so um you know I too I'm trying to figure out how what is your acts for
- 3:01:07 2026 what are you asking for total for fiscal year 2026 to include the miscellaneous and the Tourism Revolving Fund, we're asking for \$14,387,494. So that's an increase of, I could say, a million plus? Yes, Senator.
- 3:01:35 So in a million plus, does it cover personnel fringe? Yes, Senator. Time. So that's the breakdown I'd like to get. Through the chair, the million that you're asking for, you get that breakdown of all the sexual personal fringe and uh in in closing if for me mr chair the um other services and charges what what do you have for that current other services and charges we are asking for no i mean your actual go back to actuals like i say the number you gave me went higher so i i need to get your actuals just in closing up so for personnel actuals fringe supplies other services and charges personal actuals for the office of the governor the actual for other services and charges was one one million five hundred and thirty five thousand three dollars and two cents For personnel services, \$3,526,678.14. For fringe, \$1,488,567.10. For supplies, \$345,458.59. and the funding for utilities were transferred over to the single-payer.
- 3:03:20 Right, so what are you averaging for utilities a month? \$37,000, roughly \$37,000. And that's to cover your office, BER, and... The territory-wide, BER, yes. Okay, all right, thank you. Thank you for the time, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Senator. And those actuals is of what date? As of June 30th. Still June 30th?
- 3:03:46 Yes. Because the amount, I mean, there was a discrepancy in the amount based on the postcard. It was 9.3. And you said it was actually 9.835. That's correct. Okay. And that is of June 30th? Yes. Thank you. And who's responsible for overseeing the utility bills and ensuring on reconciling to make sure that you're getting what you pay for the bills are forwarded to the government of finance and they make payments directly to the utility the office of the governor once we get copies of the bill we just make sure that all of our accounts are up to date so the bills are not you reconcile them within the office and before they're sent forward to I don't know how they receive the billions but they once the billions are sent to them then they make the payments make the payments yes what about your key performance indicators who's tracking your key performance indicators we don't deputy commission you know we do not have you you know setting any goals for the various divisions and and but making sure they tracking those yes each division set set their own goals, and they track them individually. So what's the goal for the Office of Gun Violence, for example?
- 3:05:15 Tony Emanuel speaking. My goals would be to have a 100% response... The written goals. What's your written goals? Written goals. One is to have full response to victims of crimes. is to increase our availability in schools during the leadership program, the after-school program, and our after-school projects that we're working in the housing communities. I also want us to increase our community engagement, increase our PSAs, public service announcements, and messages of anti-violence and anti-bullying.
- 3:05:58 what is what is two of the goals for the bureau of economic research halden davies director of economic research if i should mention just two um upgrade the comprehensive economic development strategy get closer to the mic please upgrade the comprehensive economic development strategy and secondly facilitate start staff development in economics and forecasting tools how are you doing with those goals We are progressing very well, and we have made significant progress thus far.
- 3:06:30 What does that mean? That means that each of our goals within the BR have timelines attached to them. And we are progressing... So you have key performance indicators to support that goal? Correct. And you're checking the box and making sure that you're meeting those objectives? That is correct, sir. Okay. Point of information, Senator Fonseca. Yes. Thank you. thank you mr chair i want to follow up on that with the bureau of economic research um okay with your your goals page 15 um con conduct a study on gvi territorial health insurance give me some more details on that again halton davies director bureau of economic research within the context of the study that we propose here is to look at what applies in some other states where insurance is provided for everyone, whether they are in the public sector, the private sector, they are uninsured or on their own. So our goal here is to check the feasibility of having territorial health insurance in the United States, Virgin Islands, and to ensure that that study is carried out.

- 3:07:58 So that's similar to what the governor is calling the legislature into special session for, right? No, that is different. How is that different? No, what you refer to, Senator, is a matter of the existing public insurance plan for the government taking a different approach, whether it's full insurance or whether it is self-insurance. That's different because it's just related to the public, government insurance and agencies. But when we look at territorial health insurance, we're looking at everyone across the board, public as well as private, and the feasibility of such a thing for the territory well it's a Pope I ain't sure I understand that but thank you mr. chair for the time do you need some further clarification or it's because when it's if it's territorial government of the Virgin Islands territorial health insurance it means government of the Virgin Islands territorial health insurance and that's what Cigna provides they've provides territorial health insurance to the government of the Virgin Islands so I don't understand the difference but help me out I only have a master's degree but you know I I'm not a PhD no I I think that the word territorial may need some clarification here senator within the context thank you within the context we're talking about covering the entire territory as a whole with respect to public insurance not just the government the current insurance that the government has that is what
- 3:10:00 you refer to earlier but within this context we're looking at going full territory wide to include everybody and the feasibility of such a thing for us right private sector public sector everybody okay but it still says GVI so you're adding another word there to include the whole territory because it does says GVI but thank you mr. chair for the time thank you very much Senator Fonseca, Senator Viale, your point of information.
- 3:10:37 Yeah, thank you so much. I think it would be cleared up if you just strike GVI, because GVI means government of the Virgin Islands. So that's applicable to government of the Virgin Islands and not the whole territory. So the GVI needs to be struck, and it's just a territorial health insurance viability. But I wanted to ask you, Mr. Davies, you did a live-in wage study? The Bureau did a live-in wage study, yes, in 2022, 2023. And it was completed when?
- 3:11:03 in 2023 okay I had an opportunity to look at your living wage study and you have a chart in reference to the living wage for one adult and one child right and the amount that you have that it would be the living wage for one adult and one child is \$20.95 per hour for the household or forty three thousand \$576 per year. Correct. That's included. So I only put it out on the record, so when the argument begins as to why we raise the minimum salary to \$35,000, it is right there in BER study, but you come in with a justification that the legislature didn't do their job and didn't do this and didn't do that, and the documentation is there, and the office of the governor, that we are woefully underpaying individuals in this government and the salary should be 42 000 for one adult and a child and they said to include insurance if it's not insurance you did it two ways then it's even more okay so i i just want that that the data exists this body didn't do anything in isolation no no the data is there thank you so much mr chair uh thank you very much senator of the lady The position that's listed, Ms. Durrant, under \$35,000, what's the classification, what's the position title for those?
- 3:12:32 Those position titles are housekeepers, executive housekeepers, and attendants. as well as I see you have a lead maintenance worker as well. That salary exceeds the 35,000. Maintenance technician.
- 3:13:09 That salary exceeded 35,000. All right. Well, Senator Carl J. Joseph, you're recognized for your five minutes. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. Pleasant good afternoon to the executive staff of the Office of the Governor. How are you doing today? Great.
- 3:13:35 Good, good, good. It's good to see all of you here. I wanted to ask some questions relative to your staffing. And specifically, I wanted to ask, now you have an executive officer staff, executive security staff. How are they being treated? Are they also receiving any incremental increases? I don't know if the gentleman to my left asked that question, because he normally asks questions relative to that.
- 3:14:07 Have they received any incremental raises as well? Durant speaking, no, Senator. What is their salary base? Because you have some officers and the like, because everybody's getting increases. When was their last increase, actually? I believe that was in 2023, Senator. are you look so you're not considering any increases for your executive uh show first your executive officer staff or security staff that is in discussion so it's in discussion okay um but do you have it budgeted that's my my main question do you have it budgeted for fiscal year 2026 we're hopeful that we can okay well i hope you uh appreciate them is there i and i may have missed this because a gentleman from savannah normally asks these questions are are you looking at any increases for your team Outside of what the other increases, well, are you looking for any increases?
- 3:15:35 Not at this moment, Senator. No one, okay. I wanted to focus a little bit on your miscellaneous items, the very festivals and the like. And if this question was answered before, because I had to step out to a very important event, the Hotel and Tourism Association, the Summer Youth Employment Program Attendees Appreciation Award, and that's why I was missing a little bit. But I wanted to ask you for those items listed, and I'm going to go to page six of the post audit report, and also page seven, I see that there was some \$10,000 that's recommended and for the VI Puerto Rico Friendship Day in

2024, 100,000 was expended for 2024.

- 3:16:51 But I'm looking at the 2025 expenditure for both days for St. Thomas and St. Croix activity. And we only had a total of \$65,000. And then for fiscal year 2026, you're recommending \$100,000 for the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico Friendship Day in St. Croix. and 15,000 in St. Thomas. I know certainly the St. Croix events are much more extravagant and extensive, but I wanted to understand what was the difference? Why did you have this 50,000 difference between fiscal year 2025 and fiscal year 2026 for St. Croix for the fifty thousand dollars um senator the the rise in the increase for the vipr uh friendship dancing coy it has become very popular um and so the cost associated with um having a performance uh travel um that that is the reason why the increase so you're paying for the performance does the association do any type of fundraising as well is there like a car share i believe they do fundraising but you know it's very difficult to fundraise these days so i'm not certain how much money they fundraise but i can get that to you okay that would be very important in our deliberation now i wanted to also and if this question was asked because we had a a differential a variance for other services and charges on the same page seven and it looks like you had
- 3:18:49 an increase of two hundred and thirty three dollars two hundred thirty three thousand dollars and four four hundred and thirty one um tell me exactly two three three four three one tell me exactly what caused that increase why why you're increasing in that that time mr chairman are you seeing it miss durant no yeah okay uh page seven okay look and at other services and charge charge charges okay for fiscal year 2025 you had two thousand two million sorry two million four hundred twelve thousand eight hundred ninety dollars and now for fiscal year 2026 you're having two million one hundred seventy nine thousand four hundred fifty nine dollars which produces an increase of two hundred thirty three thousand four hundred thirty one dollars what is causing that senator durant speaking um the reduction was due to we reduce the cost for or professional services contracts. I don't know if that's a reduction. It is a reduction. Oh yes, I'm so sorry.
- 3:20:24 I'm so sorry, that's my bad. Okay, so the reduction was caused by what? A reduction in our professional services. In your professional services. What specific professional service did you eliminate? I can get that information to you through the chair, if you would like. Yes, through the chair. I know my time has expired. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, for the time. Thank you very much, Senator Joseph. Senator Blighton, you recognize for your five minutes.
- 3:20:59 Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon again to my colleagues and good afternoon to Mr. Regress and your team there with you. Thank you so much for your testimony. It's in your moment. Listen, let me ask you, in respect to the report, Office of Gun Violence, let me go there quickly. How much have you expanded to date from your budget? I know you requested 225,000. How much have you expanded to date? Durant speaking. Expanded to date, we have actual expenditures fifty four thousand one hundred twenty three dollars and eighty cents and we have some incumbencies payments that are in process of twenty three thousand one forty three so compared to last fiscal year during that time frame how much was expanding in that time frame fifty four and twenty three i don't have last year's numbers i could get that to you through the chair the reason why i'm asking because i was running on what you're asking for the same exact amount for next fiscal year so i was trying to see exactly where you where you're going to land that and how much yeah how much you expanded last fiscal year as a matter of fact total expenditures for 2024 was 229 838 dollars so you did go over um the 225 mark yes okay very well um let me ask you um in respect to i'm going to go to the ada core functional ada area because that's that's that's very important to me um i know what you provide is guidance to resident businesses and agencies on accommodation to legalize ada compliance etc and your court duty to handle an inquiries conducting site evaluations delivering training and coordinating interagency efforts so So Mr. Henry, good afternoon sir, how are you doing today?
- 3:23:06 Good afternoon, Senator. Let's talk about our property, the government buildings, and entrances to those buildings. I know you do a lot in respect to education, et cetera, and what I spoke to, but what about our buildings here in the territory, what are you doing to work with the different departments and commissioners to assure that we are in compliance, number one, and number two, that you are able to do your job and your responsibilities within the government of the Virgin Islands. can you speak to that for me please yes good afternoon and your team of one correct correct how who what when why talk to me please i have a lot of support from the office of the governor so when needed i have also uh i work with dp and r as to doing inspections working with um information because they deal with the ada code however i deal with the ada from a different aspect as far as a finished work and uh what to bring it into compliance so we once we're working together that creates a visual to making sure that all our offices are accessible and for instance what's what's your um mission or goal for the 26 budget season with with the resources you have at this moment what would you like to see differently moving well one of the things that we're going to be working on is the web content accessibility guidelines uh that project is to bring all the websites in the government to be uh in compliance with the ada okay very well thank you Thank you for that. Let me go back to the testimony.

- 3:24:56 On page six of the testimony, it spoke to an additional \$1,275,000. It's requested for miscellaneous special activities and \$200,000 request for tourism revolving fund. Miscellaneous, what's included in that category that you need a \$1,275,000 for? now the first question I have Durant speaking the \$1,275,000 we're asking for funding for government access channel \$450,000 the Puerto Rico VI friendship day territory-wide \$115,000 BVI Friendship \$75,000, Emancipation Day Activities \$10,000, Health Information Technology \$400,000 for the Exchange, Office of Gun Violence for Operational Expense \$225,000, and VIVIS Program 150 000 um expenses for annual activities which include the governor's reading challenge and other youth activities 150 000. okay with that being said let me ask you how is that being funded right now as we speak we we got the same amount um in 2025. you say you got the same amount but you're saying that you're short 1.3 million dollars so you say no we're not sure we can't speak at the same time let me finish and then you can respond you said you got the same amount as last fiscal year correct but you're asking for 1.3 million dollars more so explain that for me how are you funding it right now it was included in this year's budget also senator
- 3:27:01 what's your request for next for 30 seconds what's your request how much are you asking for \$14,387,494 to include miscellaneous of \$1,275,000 and \$300,000 for tourism revolving. Correct. And what was you asked for \$25,000?
- 3:27:36 \$13,378,494. Exactly, that's why I asked you the question, because you're requesting \$14,000, and \$25,000 is \$13,000, which is \$1 million plus more, so I'm asking you the extra \$1.3 million, and you said what it was for, so I asked you, how did you fund those activities this time? And you said it was in the budget, right? But the budget was less. So that means you got the money from someplace else. The money is coming from elsewhere. Am I correct? Yes, Senator.
- 3:28:10 Mr. Chair, doing a mock-up, we're going to have to dig a little deeper and see exactly what's going on and how we can move forward. Thank you so much for the time. Thank you for your responses. Thank you. Thank you very much. Senator Blyden, you care to expound Ms. Durant? For 2026, the Office of the Governor, we're asking for \$11,464,196. For the Bureau of Economic Research, 703-092, for the Office of Gun Violence, \$643,206, A total for general fund, \$12,812,494. We're asking in addition to that, for \$1,275,000 for miscellaneous items. And for the tourism revolving fund, \$300,000.
- 3:29:19 For a total funding of \$14,387,494. And also be reminded that there is also an extraction of the monies for the utility that goes straight to the single-payer utility. That's correct, \$514,000. At this time, Senator Fonseca, you recognize for your five minutes. Yes, thank you, and good afternoon to the governor's office team. question just for my knowledge the other services is basically can be used for a lot of miscellaneous items right Doran speaking yes Senator okay good well you know I got an idea for you here if you go in the back of Windward Passage hotel right they got sewage back up and an overflow that is, I think it's a combination of, well we got testimony is a combination of the all lateral lines that's collapsed, etc, etc. Would that be something that would qualify for other services to do a clean up down there? We're not talking about changing the lines. We're just talking about taking some Clorox, going down there, hosing it up and cleaning it off. Would that qualify as other services well not if it's relative to the office of the governor i mean that would be under waste management but you is your st thomas administrator off under the office of the governor uh yes so those calls go to the st thomas administration you see the reason why i'm bringing it to your attention is because waste management been here two times in the last month and they promised that they're gonna take a look and they're gonna coordinate and they're gonna you know get an estimate and they're gonna do everything there's never been a date public works is telling us right out is not their job so we have to go to the head because it is a public sanitary nightmare it's a it's a it's really an emergency businesses have closed down the hairdresser that was right there she had to close down all of us has been back there so we're making a special appeal to the governor's office just clean it up don't you see what i'm saying just clean it up um and since we got testimony
- 3:31:54 would qualify for all other services because waste management don't have no money they'll even though we gave them five million dollars in the latest round round we gave a 6.5 extended hospital waste management is still telling us they don't have money and it's even though they have three point something billion in in total disaster to replace the main lines they don't have the money for the laterals they don't have to charge basically it's been over a year this place is smelling it's been over a year please clean it up so that I want to bring some clarity to your statement because as the acting administrator I myself has visited that area right we've We've educated the folks not to put rash rag down the lines, not to pour oil down the lines. And when we go and waste management clean it up, we go right back to that establishment. You open up the sewage line and they have oil, they have rash rags. So, I mean, it's a compound situation whereby we also need to help educate those businesses around the area and the residents to help mitigate and reduce that problem okay and i i understand however the testimony before the legislature it's been like that for a year and two months that's the testimony we got a testimony so let me go to some quick budget questions so the bureau of economic research no let me go to the office of health information technology health information exchange for us there's any vacancies there good afternoon senator michelle francis director of office of health information technology yes we have two vacancies

- 3:33:41 two vacancies okay so you know this health information exchange right i've been to the training and by the way you do excellent work congratulations um but this information is needed so that we can improve the efficiency of treatment of patients you can go to a doctor in St. Croix today you go to a doctor in St. Thomas today and they can pull up this information so I'm surprised that I think it's four hundred thousand dollars is is that what is needed to fully implement this health information exchange or this is just a phase implementation good question thank you again michelle francis one minute so the four hundred thousand dollars was one based on what prior needs were i worked very closely with medicaid in the department of human services for federal funding most of these large transformation projects are funded through the feds what we're facing now which we all know is a decrease in funding from the feds for many of these things in Medicaid's facing a decrease so the local budget alone no will not be sufficient we have sent legislation down which I hope will be heard we desperately need it heard so that we don't lose federal funding that includes 300,000 in ARPA we'll lose it by the end of this fiscal year by the end of the calendar year of 25 if we don't stand up the health data utility that governs the health information exchange and we're also asking for a million dollars a year through that legislation because that's what it's gonna cost to bring on the hospitals the FQHCs and private providers okay so see
- 3:35:38 I'm gonna be your voice I think more money needs to be put into the second health information exchange because remember this is patient data confidential we've done the roll out the Commissioner of Health the Commissioner of Human Services the feds have been down here the Medicaid program has get gotten received accolades so we need to get this thing fully implemented mr. chair was time call okay good so one other question I want to go back to the Bureau of Economic Research so I looked on the website the gross domestic product is the last one is 2022. I know you've just come on but why haven't we updated it? We can't have a gross domestic product three years old because that's very, very important information. That's the whole economy of the Virgin Islands. So when can you get an updated gross domestic product for 2023?
- 3:36:44 And the short answer, Senator, is we are putting in place the applicable mechanisms. We've had conversations with the Office of Insular Affairs that implemented the pause on the GDP, GDP being calculated by the Bureau of Economic Analysis. And we are focusing our efforts in collaboration with them to ensure that we can get this going within short order. So right now we are focusing on putting together and bringing on the administrative data additional administrative data that is needed we have been in contact with various departments and agencies already an additional communication will be going out so that that type of data could come in and we will begin to get the GDP on stream again we want to make sure However, that it is consistent.
- 3:37:46 The approach that we use is consistent with the approach taken over the last 20 years by the Bureau of Economic Analysis. And that's what the conversations are around right now. Well, Sir Popa, you see, I asked for a date when we can get the 2023 GDP, and I still haven't heard. I would say, yeah, yeah, I would say that based on where we are right now, we should have our GDP up to date before the end of this calendar year. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the time.
- 3:38:21 Thank you very much, Senator Fonseca. Any point of, you had a point, Senator DeGraff? You had a point? Senator Carlos Jesus, recognize your point of information. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. I don't know if this was covered already, but I was looking through some of the appendices to your presentation, the appendix post audit appendix when it talks about all other services and OC, and on page 28, it has for credit card annual finances, finance charge.
- 3:39:02 This is a huge jump from what was the actual fiscal year 2024, which was \$173,807.46 to what is the actual fiscal year 2025 as of June 30th, which is now \$304,437.23. What is causing that? Because it looks as though with this rate, you might be spending a bit about \$350,000 in credit card charges until the end of the fiscal year.
- 3:39:53 So could you break that down for us and tell us what is the finance charge, how much you pay in finance charges, and what is the balance right now on your credit card? Okay. Durant speaking. Senator, that amount, what happened is finance created one object code for all the credit card payments. So, whether we're buying supplies or travel expenses, everything is lumped together, and those credit cards are reconciled monthly. Okay, what is your current balance on the credit card, and at what rate is your finance charge? The credit cards are paid off monthly, there's no finance charge.
- 3:40:48 Because you pay them off? pay them off monthly yes okay so you don't have a running balance right okay how many credit cards you have six six credit cards and and and who is the custodian of the six credit cards who are the custodians of the six credit cards um we have the governor the chief of staff the deputy chief of staff the director of business and administration um the director of executive security and one special assistant to the governor for special um special project coordinator a special assistant and no special project coordinator sorry okay special project coordinator and what is the limit on I guess each credit card has a different limit that's correct senator okay and what's what's the various the the average limit the the lowest and the highest let's go with that the highest is 60,000 and the lowest is 5,000 okay thank you so much mr. chairman thank you very much senator Joseph senator DeGraff you recognize your point of information I will come to you Thank you, Mr. Chair.

- 3:42:06 Okay, Ms. Durant, I just wanted to address some numbers. The post-audit report, page 6 again. The numbers that they have are 9,368,755. You said that your allotment on June 30th was 9,835,851.70. There's a difference there of \$467,096. I didn't see in the post-audit report could you tell me where more or less would that money be? You see what I'm saying okay that would include some miscellaneous items that have been released thus far for the year oh they were already budgeted in 89.16 they were already budgeted and they were released okay and then just in closing the 13 million 567,494 is your 25 budget that's correct you divide that into four quarters I'm going to give you \$3,391,873. The balance of your \$9,835,851 leaves you \$3,731,643 with a remaining balance of \$339,770.
- 3:43:47 Our allotment is done monthly by OMB, not quarterly right, but still it's going to be by four quarters, twelve months, same amount. So our balance, remaining balance will be \$1,967, \$170 \$1,009. For the fiscal year \$1,009,67 \$170 \$170 the zero. Okay.
- 3:44:18 Okay, and I'll do the breakdown on that. But you had the money to cover for the individuals you say you're bringing on? That's correct, Senator. You have it in the 25 budget, it's going to be in the 26th. 2025. Okay, for the six people here at Ambo? I'm sorry? That the Chief of Staff was speaking of. You covered them. Ah, yeah. So you have the money. Okay, just check it. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much, and Mr. Durant, if at some point please update the post-audit with that information, the increase from 9.3 to 9,835,851.70.
- 3:45:00 Certainly. Senator Fonseca, you recognize for your point of information? Thank you. Director, Michelle Francis. Is Medicaid covering any of the portion for the health information exchange? And also, are all the hospitals, the clinics, and all the private physicians going to be on it? Thank you for your question. Michelle Francis, Office of Health Information Technology.
- 3:45:30 So Medicaid is the primary funder right now. Long term, we're going to need to find additional funds. My office secured 1.3 million in grant funding to help because Medicaid has requirements about supporting the Medicaid enterprise, which means Medicaid patients and providers. So that means there are some private practices that Medicaid doesn't cover. We've requested through an IAPD a planning document to have 90% of the implementation covered in FY24 they did cover 90% we have already secured this technology for the health information exchange onboarding the hospitals and the FQHC is very good question the grants that my office has are gonna go towards paying for their fee because there's a fee for every connection it but they're not fully covered through into perpetuity so for FY 25 FY 24 25 my office was able to cover them through grants and there's some partial coverage for them through Medicaid however what's not covered is that 10% local match that's left to OHIT to help find and right now that that number could change depending on which way the feds go and so that number could increase and we could have a gap. And I think you'll hear more about that in DHS's hearing. Depending on which way the feds go, are there cuts in the new big bill, big beautiful bill? There's been reductions. I can't speak, Director Gary Smith can speak directly to where we've been cut. Some things we've been spared from in terms of enhanced funding he'll have to speak more specifically to that but there is a risk we're still waiting to hear back on the planning document that's in right now for the HIE thank you thank you Mr. Chair thank you very much senator
- 3:47:40 Fonseca Mr. Deputy Chief of Staff in regards to your funding levels at this point are you satisfied that you will be able to complete the remainder of the year and come in in the black yes senator very well anything here about the budget that's challenging or present any concerns or issue at this point uh no senator very well I'll give you 30 seconds to wrap up yes uh senator I'd like to just take this opportunity on behalf of Governor Albert Bryant to take this opportunity to thank you for not for the opportunity to present our fiscal year 2026 budget and I'd like to also acknowledge our hard-working employees at Government House who have done a really good job in providing the necessary service to the people at the Virgin Islands. There are three folks that we loan from the Department of Education. As mentioned, under the Administrator's Office, we have two staff members that are out and they're critically ill, but those three employees from education has filled the gap, and we're hopeful that we're able to continue with them in the next couple months until our staff members return. But I want to thank this august body for an opportunity to present our 2026 budget.
- 3:49:08 Thank you very much for coming before us. We continue to wish our governor well, and we look forward to wrapping up this budget cycle at some point, be able to get this budget up to government house in a timely fashion. We're still awaiting the insurance that will help us to be able to advance and be prepared for the numbers during our markup. But we want to deliver this budget well in advance of at least 30 days ahead so that we can make sure that we're in place and we don't find ourselves in a quagmire October you know so for the start of the new fiscal year I want to thank my colleagues I know it's been a tough week I work you guys hard this week you know it's we had four days of budget hearings five days of hearings and I appreciate all of your hard work commitment and staying in the paint with me during at that time as well as my non-committee members you know thank thank you for being here I I want to thank central staff as well. And, you know, again, have a great weekend, everyone.

3:50:13 The Committee of Budget, Appropriations, and Finance is here by adjourning. God bless.

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.

6x	Senator Ray Fonseca heard in this transcript as: Fonseca
4x	Senator Dwayne DeGraff heard in this transcript as: DeGraff, Duane DeGraff
4x	Senator Hubert Frederick heard in this transcript as: Frederick, Hibbert Frederick
4x	Senator Marise C. James the surname alone also matches: Javan James; Giovanni James Sr heard in this transcript as: James, Maurice James
3x	Governor Albert Bryan Jr
3x	Senator Carla Joseph the surname alone also matches: Clifford Joseph; Karla J. Joseph heard in this transcript as: Carl J. Joseph, Joseph
3x	Dr. Haldane Davies heard in this transcript as: Haldeen Davis, Haldene Davies
3x	Senator Kurt Violet heard in this transcript as: Viala, Viale
3x	Senator Marvin Blyden heard in this transcript as: Blyden
2x	Senator Angel L. Bocas Jr heard in this transcript as: Angel Bocas Jr.
2x	Senator Angel L. Bolques, Jr. heard in this transcript as: Angel Bolquez, Angel L. Bolques Jr.
2x	Senator Claudette Farrington
2x	Governor Kenneth Mapp heard in this transcript as: Kenneth E. Mapp
2x	Senator Marvin A. Blighton heard in this transcript as: Blighton
2x	Senator Novelle Francis heard in this transcript as: Novel E. Francis Jr.

Bills and acts referred to

Matched by number against our own acts corpus. The number is what the recognition heard, so it may be wrong; where it resolved, the title is the one the Legislature gave the act.

Act 8542	Act 8542 · March 24, 2022 · An Act amending the Virgin Islands Code, title 3, chapter 29, relating to notaries, notarial officers, and notarial acts by adding subchapter III enacting the ·Virgin Islands Uniform Law on Notarial Acts (2022); and amending and repealing conflicting laws on notaries public, including title 3 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 29, subchapter I, sections 772, 773, 774, 775, 776 and subchapter II, and repealing title 28 Virgin Islands, chapter 5 a
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