



Committee on Rule and Judiciary | May20, 2021

Legislature USVI

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0:00:00 Let's go! Thank you.

0:01:00 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

0:04:00 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

0:05:30 Thank you. We'll be right back. [2 such phrases repeated 17 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

0:14:00 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Good morning colleagues, good morning central staff, employees, a special good morning to the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Committee on Rules and Judiciary Meeting of May 20th, 2021, is hereby called to order. But before we move forward, I would really like to recognize two dynamic brothers with deep roots on St. Thomas, Mayenne and Mayelle LaMotta,

0:16:14 for earning the highly coveted Eagle Scout rank. These ranks are not handed out willy-nilly. Only four percent, four percent of scouts earned this status. Kudos to these two young men on achieving this milestone. Young men, your futures are limitless. Congratulations to their proud parents, my fraternity brother Mr. Glenn LaMarta and Mrs. Elmer Brathwith LaMarta. You did an exceptional job raising these fine gentlemen. And finally a special kudos to their extended family to include aunts Elma Brathwit-Cortis and Debbie Brathwit. It truly takes a village.

0:17:04 Kudos to Mayen and Mayel LaMotta for earning the highly coveted Eagle Scout rank. Congratulations. Also we know summer is rapidly approaching and I'd really like to invite VI youngsters between ages of 11 and 18 to consider enrolling in our virtual financial literacy summer boot camp. It's going to be a powerful opportunity to expose your children to the world of finance to include building smart financial habits, the economy and you, credit and debit, and an introduction to investing. Investing 101. As Virgin Islanders, financial know-how has been I think a significant weakness of ours. It is imperative that we build a generation of financially astute Virgin Islanders. The only individuals who did well during

COVID-19 were those persons who were invested in the stock market. We must place our children on a level playing field with their pairs on a global arena. For more information on the financial boot camp, and that's a territorial boot camp so whether you live on St. Thomas, St. John or St. Croix, you have young people between the ages of 11 and 18, you can participate. Please log on to my website www.senatormiltonpatter.com for more information. Madam Clerk, can we have a roll call, please?

0:19:06 Senator Norville E. Francis, Jr., Senator Norville E. Francis, Jr., present. Senator Kenneth L. Giddens, here. Senator Kenneth L. Giddens, present. Franklyn D. Johnson. Senator Franklin D. Johnson present. Senator Carla Joseph. Senator Carla Joseph absent. Present. Present. Senator Carla Joseph present. Senator Stephen Payne Sr.

0:19:44 Present. Senator Stephen Payne Sr. present. Senator Milton Potter present. Senator Senator Potter, present. Senator Potter, present. Senator Genevieve Whitaker, Senator Genevieve Whitaker, absent. Mr. Chairman, six present, one absent. Thank you very much, Madam Clerk. Colleagues, we have a quorum, and we may proceed. Madam Clerk, are there any pieces of correspondence to be read into the record at this time? Yes, Mr. Chairman. Letter dated May 20th, 2021, the Honorable Milton E. Potter, Chairman, Committee on Rules and the Judiciary, 24th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, Capitol Building, Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, 00804. Dear Chairman Potter, unfortunately, due to a previously scheduled meeting, I will be late to today's hearing on the Committee on Rules and the Judiciary, scheduled to begin at 10 o'clock a.m. in the Fritz E. Louetsk Legislative Conference Room on St. Croix.

0:20:44 I am asking that I be recorded as excused. I do apologize for any inconvenience, and I shall join at my earliest convenience. Thank you for your understanding in this matter. Sincerely, Senator Genevieve Whitaker, MCJ, MPM, CPM, JD, Legislative Secretary, 34th Legislative of the Virgin Islands. Thank you very much, Madam Clerk. Please record Senator Whitaker as excused.

0:21:16 Colleagues, let's get started with our nominee on block number one, Dr. Celia Nurse for the Board of Nurse Licensure. Dr. Nurse, are you there? Yes, I am present. Can you hear me well? I can hear you well and I'm seeing you. Thank you very much for being here. Thank you very much for accepting the nomination to this very important board. Can you proceed please with your testimony? It's an honor to be here.

0:22:02 I'm sorry, Dr. Norris, I'm sorry. I'm missing a step. As is customary, I'm going to ask you to raise your right hand. Do you swear that the testimony you're about to give and your responses to all questions posed will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth yes okay thank you you may now proceed with your testimony thank you a pleasant good morning to senator milson potter committee chairman other senators present and the viewing and listening audience I am dr. Celia nurse nominee to the Virgin Islands Board of Nurse licensure I was born and raised on the island of St. Thomas grew up in the housing community, attended Joseph Gomez Elementary School, Bertha C. Bushelton Middle School, Ivana Eudorican High School, and obtained my undergraduate nursing education from the University of the Virgin Islands. I am a proud product of this territory.

0:23:15 And when I think about who I am today, I relish in my deep appreciation from where I come from and in the joys of my experiences in the nursing profession to date. My patients, my colleagues, and my students who are all valuable members of my community are integral components of my love and dedication to the nursing profession. My decision to pursue my masters of science in nursing education in 2013 was due to my longstanding passion for teaching combined with the fulfillment of purpose I find in nursing. The US Virgin Islands is the only home I have ever known and I crave not only to see my home grow, but to collaboratively participate in its growth and development. I wish to contribute my knowledge, skill set and intuitive awareness relevant to nursing education and administration to the growth of this territory by serving on the Virgin Islands Board of Nurse Licensure as educator.

0:24:21 My academic preparation and experience in nursing education and leadership, active involvement in state and local community organizations, understanding of this community's culture, strengths, and areas for potential growth, as well as my passion qualifies me to serve on the Virgin Islands Board of Nurse Licensure as educator. As a proud native of the USVI, I have an unwavering commitment to investing in the future of nursing and quality health care in this territory. In addition to my academic qualifications as a nurse educator, I am also a doctorally prepared registered nurse. I teach several nursing courses as a nurse educator at the Raphael Wheatley Skills Center and the University of the Virgin Islands, and I am continually involved in research, grant writing, research proposal projects with professionals of this and other communities.

0:25:23 I am also the program chair and academic advisor, as well as the Assessments Technology Institute, also known as ATI, coordinator of the BSN program at the University of the Virgin Islands School of Nursing. My passion and my vision for the sustenance of growth and the continuation of nursing education and clinical experiences, even in pandemics, is to ensure that we continue to produce nurses to meet the needs of this community and others. I am also technologically

savvy and apply these skills to my daily work as a nurse educator in this new virtual environment. On an annual basis, I mentor existing RNs and LPNs, deliver BLS, which is basic life skills, courses through the American Heart Association, create educational videos for community organizations such as the Rotarac, Tropical Nurse Haven, and the Ro-Omicron Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority. I also attend and or moderate panels at local and state conferences and provide professional consultation services through UVI Cell to community agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency, EMS, Fire Services, Department of Education, Department of Justice, Schneider Regional Medical Center and Wang F. Louis Hospital.

0:26:56 if confirmed to contribute to the growth of my community through my service as educator on the Virgin Islands Board of Nurse Licensure. My short term goals would include number one, to work with the Virgin Islands Board of Nurse Licensure to gain a greater understanding of the successes, needs and challenges at the organization relevant to nursing education. Number two, to restore the Virgin Islands Board of Nurse licensure website and function to promote future development of an access to educational resources for USVI nurses and graduate nurses. For example, the presence of links to approved refresher programs when they're studying for their NCLEX, which is the examination you have to take to become a registered nurse after graduating.

0:27:53 Number three, improve collaboration between the Virgin Islands Board of Nurse Licensure and the University of the Virgin Islands. And lastly, number four, to streamline the application process for USVI nursing licenses to promote smoother transitions for nurse educators who are hired by UVI from outside of the territory. If confirmed, my long-term goals would include, Number one, to develop an education committee within the Virgin Islands Board of Nurse licensure that functions to collaborate with community stakeholders such as SRMC, Schneider Regional Medical Center, Wang F. Louis Hospital, the University of the Virgin Islands, Raphael O'Wheatly Skills Center, and the Virgin Islands State Nurses Association.

0:28:46 And the purpose of collaborating with these community stakeholders would be to assess meet the education needs of nursing profession in the territory. Number two, develop the Virgin Islands Board of Nurse licensure website into a user-friendly comprehensive informational platform that appeals to nurses within the territory, attracts nurses from outside of the territory, and promotes transparency in the efforts relevant to nursing education. For example, on the website there could be the minutes from the education committee meetings that are available to the public for viewing number three streamline the process of extracting data collected at the virgin islands board of nurse licensure to facilitate opportunities for research in nursing education and improvements based on the results of that research lastly number four to consider the growth of policies that foster interdisciplinary education at the bsn program at uvi and so this interdisciplinary education concerns itself with the opportunity for physical therapists medical doctors respiratory therapists etc to provide lectures to nursing students or to be hired to teach courses as a lifelong learner that strives for continued growth and excellence i am committed to maximizing this opportunity to work brilliantly with the other members of the virgin islands board of nurse licensure as educator to impact positive change in the virgin islands accordingly i thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee i humbly ask for

0:30:40 your support of my nomination i remain prepared and available to answer any questions you may have thank you thank you very much for your presentation dr nurse the committee will stand in recess for two minutes two minutes Thank you. Thank you.

0:32:10 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

0:35:10 Thank you. Thank you. so Committee on Rules and Judiciary is back on the record.

0:36:54 Colleagues, we're going to start with a four-minute round, and we're going to start on St. Thomas with Senator Stephen Payne. Dr. Nuss, thank you very much for your testimony, your passionate testimony. money. We're going to start off our four-minute round with Senator Payne. Thank you very much for the time Senator, Mr. Chair, Mr. Chair, truly appreciate it. Nothing wrong with the at-large being first. I understand that you made a mistake in the four minutes and you actually said that at-large could have an extra two minutes onto the floor. Thank you very much for that. Good morning to the listening and viewing audience. Good morning, morning to the testifiers good morning good morning it's such a good morning today ah miss nurse i see that you followed in my footsteps all the way from elementary school from joseph gomez to bcb the middle school all the way up to senior high school as a proud devilry so let me ask you let me start off with asking i'm seeing that you're a product of the educational schools in st thomas including my alma mater the famous devil ray high school uh how did going how did going away from the territory to pursue your master's and phd impact your career goals compared to if you had stayed here in the territory just to offer clarification i stayed here for all of my my educational endeavors except for my masters and my phd with where i couldn't i couldn't do it here if the opportunity existed for me to do my masters and my phd locally i definitely would have pursued that um but my undergraduate degree, my bachelor's of science and nursing degree, I pursued that at the University of the Virgin Islands. So where I had

no other option, I pursued my master's and PhD, and I did those online. So I didn't leave my home to pursue my education, I just have some extras. Does that answer your question?

0:39:13 Yes, but do you think that those are degrees that should be offered here locally so that people who want to pursue their master's in your field should actually be able to do this at home? Yes. Yes, definitely. Okay. was there a difference we had some recent discussions about potentially having a a master's program at the university of the virgin islands the the challenge has always been and still is um our capacity to support these these programs we will need individuals that are interested in in being nurse educators and who are employed as nurse educators to support those those those programs we are definitely looking at those possibilities actively and presently and passionately i can see that i can see that um you know for years we always have young people who travel to the mainland and complete their educational studies and they're very reluctant to come back home because of the offers that they receive on the mainland as opposed to what they would actually receive here at home what was the driving force that actually made you want to come back home as opposed to staying on the mainland so i've never been to the mainland i've never lived anywhere else other than here but what made me want to stay here even after completing my degrees is is my love for for my home you know i'm not and you know i speak for myself i'm not motivated by by money i'm motivated by purpose and the work that i do and the goals that i want to achieve i want them to benefit my home i don't mind serving other places in the world but if there are needs at home i want to address those needs first before i go out into the world and and um support the needs of others which i you know i'd be more than willing to do but there are needs here and and yes you know a lot of the the offers here you know do not measure

0:41:36 up to the offers on a you know on a monetary basis that exists elsewhere in the world but if that is your driving force yes you will leave but um you know for me that wasn't my my driving force and it still isn't so okay very good answers uh you mentioned in your testimony several platforms where you mentor residents of the territory including the versions of education so how would you assist youth and young adult uh interests in the nursing profession here so we've done a lot of um initiatives through the student nurses association it's unfortunately been a little bit dormant since coronavirus hit but we have a lot of you know as we begin to open up as the territory begins to open up again and more people get vaccinated um we we're hoping to to start the Student Nurses Association and continue those endeavors to reach out to our public schools.

0:42:43 Mr. Chair, can I have just one follow-up, please? You may proceed. Okay, lastly, what additional policies or practices do you think the legislature or the Department of Education or the board can do to incentivize young people to go into the field of nursing? that's a very good question that is a very good question um i i'm aware of the policies that are presently on the table um i think they are good places to start in terms of incentivizing young people that particular population and i apologize that i don't have enough information to to answer that you know give a thoughtful response to that question because what i would need to know is where are the young people at right now the young people who are not interested in in nursing or in health care you have to meet people where they're at i need to know where they at um how they feel about it and then we can address those those thoughts and those perspectives after we understand what the limitations are okay thanks for that answer but um maybe what you can do in your once you are confirmed i'm sure you will be um working on education having classes having summer programs with the department of education where they actually go to uvi and actually take nursing like beginning nursing courses at uva as a something like a summer intern, maybe that would incentivize a lot of young people to actually want to get into that field.

0:44:26 Thank you for the time, and thank you for your responses, Dr. Nurse, and thank you for the time, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much, Senator Payne. Next up, Senator Joseph, you're recognized for your four minutes. A pleasant good morning Mr. Chairman, a pleasant good morning to our listening and viewing audience, a pleasant good morning to my colleagues. This nominee has given me a level of zest this morning and I'm saying it because she She too has moved similar to myself and I can definitely relate to her not wanting to leave our soil where we were born. She also came up through Joseph Gomez, which I too did.

0:45:27 BCB, graduate of Ivana Eudorican, magnificent class of 1988. We are known for being able to march respectfully to assure that the gymnasium was built, and in fact, it's built in honor of one of my classmates, Degna Wheatley, and she also went to, attended, and graduated from the University of the Virgin Islands. Kudos to you on your accomplishments. Kudos to you on being able to stand firm in pursuit of your passion. I want to ask you some questions this morning, Miss Nurse, because I'm duly impressed with your resume, I'm duly impressed with your grit, I'm duly impressed with the individual you are that our community has helped harvest. Now, in your testimony, I did not see, I may have missed it, any information or you're sharing any information relative to those individuals who have mentored you along the way would you please kindly delineate about that I thank you for that question it's so important to pay homage to those that groom us um how far back do you want to go uh just be as succinct as you can because the time is running i have other

some other questions um but you know present presently at the forefront of my mind are my my current mentors who are dr lanciclo she's also the dean of the school of nursing she's my boss and she's also my mentor she's very supportive i also have with i also

0:47:26 have a mentor with the through the sigma theta tau international on the society of nursing dr durette welk she's awesome and amazing she pours into me as i pour into others and dr nunez dr nunez was my nursing professor at the school of nursing when i attended she's a great mentor and you know I try to emulate her her dedication and her focus and her accomplishments and you know I have family members as well that I consider very important my sisters my parents and you know I could open up my box of elementary school education but i won't do that today it'll suck up all your time okay thank you so much for being so uh gracious and practicing some good judgment now let's uh look at what you have been able to do for our community have you had any practical nursing experience in our i saw that you had some nursing experience in our schneider regional medical center for a bit of a spell um it is understood that if you are on this board that you won't be able to be practicing correct are you telling me i'm asking i was not aware of that presently i don't practice at a regional medical center the only place that i i actively practice nursing care is at VI Neurological Center with Dr. Nelson I'm his per diem registered nurse

0:49:15 okay mr. chairman I did hear that time was called may I continue I just want to wrap up please would you be so gracious and allow me that leeway definitely you may take a minute to wrap up Senator Joseph thank you so much now my final question is I've heard your your mentors do you have persons that you are mentoring because we have to be able to pass that torch along oh my oh my so many so many as as a matter of fact i recently and as recent as last last year i recently realized the value of having a mentor when you are a mentor so i spend a lot of time pouring into my students and my colleagues and it can become very draining to do all that pouring and pouring and pouring you need people to fill you up in the interim so um you know through the through sigma theta tau international honor society of nursing i actually have i actually have the opportunity to work with my mentor dr welt on a regular basis and so i get that regular refill of support and encouragement and motivation and so yes I have many many many mentees that can attest to to the ongoing support that I provide them and it you know it usually begins in school and then when they become nurses we remain in very close contact okay thank you so much mr. chairman thank you so much miss nurse at the appropriate time I am not shy at this moment to say that that I will be voting vivaciously in the affirmative. Thank you so much.

0:51:04 Thank you very much, Senator Joseph. Senator Francis, you're recognized for your four minutes, sir. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Good morning to you, my colleagues, and good morning to the nominees, as well as good morning to the people of the Virgin Islands. I wanna take this opportunity to thank Dr. Nurse for her willingness to serve in this very, very important role as a volunteer. Basically, it's a volunteer assignment that will be taking a lot of your time and also, again, requires your steadfast commitment if you can truly be effective at this board.

0:51:44 Are you prepared to undertake the commitment to make sure that you're available, attend board meetings and uh and the like yes and i'm happy you asked that question because you i have a few individuals who actually encouraged me to pursue this this opportunity and when they originally encouraged me to do so i was not in the position to commit because i had just been promoted to um i had just been elected by my colleagues to serve as program chair of the bsn program and i wanted to focus on learning that new role so that was over a year ago and so now i can confidently say that i am in a position to fully commit to all the requirements and the needs and more of of this of this role so as an educator you have had the opportunity to to meet and work along with a lot of our local nurses and to have their engagement. And I know that we recently graduated a class as well. Can you speak to some of the advice, some of the engagement that you have had with some of these nurses as they undertake this very noble profession? My mom was a nurse herself and I certainly have an affinity for nursing. And, you know, again, how have you shared that engagement and encouragement to those individuals that intend to undertake this responsibility?

0:53:25 You know, the Bible has a verse in Matthew that says, the greatest among you are those who serve. And so my advice to those who are just graduating and those who are considering becoming nurses is that this is a profession of service and if you choose to commit to this this this profession that means that you are great you are great you are the greatest and so you want to remember that in your communication you want to remember that and how you carry yourself you want to remember that in how you respond to disappointment to hurt to you know moments where you become angry how you manage your emotions um remembering that you are it's the greatest among you know people in a room you have to remember to carry yourself as such and that you know it will be hard it is not easy but it is very very rewarding very very rewarding and you have you sit in a you sit in a position where you have the opportunity to make a difference and and touch the lives of so many so many and when you do that you know they never forget you they always remember how you made them feel and and at the end of the day when your feet are hurting when you're tired you're hungry you're holding your urine from 10 o'clock this morning none of that stuff will really matter because you'll remember that

moment when your patient told you thank you for everything you have done for me today so it really um it's a it's a really it's a very noble profession as you said but just remember that it's not easy but it is worth it not to mention

0:55:24 is also a profession where you have the opportunity to continue to grow i am obsessed with growth i i love anything that grows i'm attracted to anything that can continue to grow and so you have the opportunity to continue to grow there is no end to anything you do in nursing you can continue to grow professionally emotionally um you know in your competence and so so um i encourage those who are thinking about it to to push forward and those who graduate the difficulty of nursing school was one thing and then when you get into the profession you'll face more difficulties uh thank you very much mr chairman if i could just ask your indulgence to two additional questions because i can see the passion and compassion in this um in this nominee in terms of even having this discussion.

0:56:20 And the reality is I came from a law enforcement profession for 25 years, and I think that nursing, I'll venture to sit, I'll give you the up in terms of that profession over law enforcement this time around. But I wanted to ask you quickly, what do you believe are your strengths? Everyone has strengths and they have weaknesses. Can you speak to your strengths? Yes, I think some of my strengths are the ability to remain calm in the face of adversity. So I have this, and I haven't always had this, but I can say that today I have the ability to manage my emotions very well. So, you know, in the face of disappointment and anger and, you know, it could be something as extreme as somebody screaming in my face, I have the ability to remain calm.

0:57:21 So I'm very even-tempered. And so I think that that is a strength. And not only am I able to remain calm, but I'm also able to think clearly in the moment. And so that, you know, that contributes to my ability to remain professional and respectable and to keep or remain focused to the task at hand or the goal at hand or the message that I'm trying to convey. um i i also think that another strength um is that i i care about others a lot and you know not just people but also things i'll pull over on the side of the road to help a chick a little baby chicken find a mother you know you know i'm just i'm very very care caring and i'm always willing to help um you know to help to help people so i would say those are two of my my biggest strengths very well and conversely um what is your weaknesses what do you consider you want to talk about that today yeah there's there's there's a balance there's always a balance to the approach right yeah yeah um i would say that my it's funny you should ask because i i thought about that today i say you know just in case somebody asks let me be prepared to answer this because frankly i don't keep my weaknesses at the forefront of my mind um and and so my you know one of my weaknesses is that i am not well versed in politics from a very you know and that's just something from very small so i have a lot of um of reading and and um understanding to to partake in when it comes to politics um i shy away from listening to the news because I'm an empath so I read a horrible news article and I'd feel horrible and it affects it affects my day um it can't depending on what the story is about especially things with children so I'm working on that I'm working on that I know that I have to you know keep up with the things that are happening in in my community not just the things that concern nursing but everything else I'm also not registered to vote there I said it but that is that will change that will change so two things I have for you one is to get registered and two is to do your homework in terms of politics because in fact you're entering a political board a political board that will require some political maneuvering

1:00:00 so I would ask that you do that but I thank you for your responses thus far we didn't get an opportunity to go into to the Licensed Nurses Compact agreement that I wanted to kind of engage you with, but nonetheless, I think that your responses have been above board, and certainly you do meet the qualifications for this board that you have applied for. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for the time and opportunity. Thank you very much, Senator Francis. I was 100% sure that Ms. Norris, Dr. Norris, voted for me, but I guess you did not. Next, I'm going to ask Senator Franklin Johnson. You're recognized for your four minutes.

1:00:49 Good morning, Mr. Chair. Good morning to the listening and viewing audience. And good morning to Dr. Cecilia Nurse. I don't know where to start, because I was planning on voting for you, but you tell me you don't vote. So now I got to wonder if I should vote. I don't know. I'm going to have to take a little advice from my colleagues here today. But on a very serious note, I'm proud of you. I'm proud when I see a voring island step up to the plate. And I look at your testimony and everything, and not a lot of questions for me to ask. And I apologize because I stepped out. We had a little emergency meeting, so I didn't hear all the questions my colleagues gave. But I didn't have a doubt as to what direction I was going after, looking at your testimony, looking at your resume, and then for the brief moment, listening to your passion.

1:01:48 So I'm going to consider giving you a vote. So you got a little one in the back to hold on to. What I would like to ask, what policy, if this question haven't been asked, what policy do you think could be implemented to make the board licensure easier to work with? So, you know, I'm aware that the compact license legislature is on the table for consideration. I do think that, you know, that would make the VIBNM more attractive, not only to nurses outside of the

territory, but to nurses who are in the territory.

1:02:32 And, you know, so that's policy-wise. but also i think that the vi board of nurse licensure does need um you know i put emphasis on the website because we really need a website you know not only that that not only exists but that is also very user friendly that is you know that is filled with information because in the in the times that we are in today where so many things are done virtually to not have a website is unattractive of any board and so we we definitely so i you know i think it's the policies but it's also um oh you know a way of of a way of doing that we need to to look at and rethink how we do things um and make it more relevant more current um and move with the times be willing to grow you know not just implement something that fits today and then keep it for the next 30 years but be willing to evolve as the world around us evolves all right now you know everyone that goes to the hospital appreciate when they meet a local nurse one of their family members or just just somebody from home what is it going to take what do we need to do to try to attract our young ladies and male? Because there are male nurse too. What is it going to take for us to do that, to try to get our people to understand that this is a profession, it's a needed profession, and it's better for our people to take care of us? What would it take for us to enhance that opportunity or encouragement to our young

1:04:18 people? I think doing more outreach that is not done by the faculty, but that is done by the students who are currently enrolled in the program and also the nurses who are presently practicing as RNs and LPNs. I think outreach for, you know, from people who are actually in the position doing the work to, you know, our high school and even from our middle, you know, to our middle school students i think that is very important maybe from elementary school we want to catch them when they're you know they're very open-minded and impressionable even though at that young age they already know what they want to be when they grow up or they have ideas of it um so i i think more outreach that's that's done by you know our rns our lpns and our students i think will make a big difference mr. chair can I just I just have one more I need to ask this question because I haven't seen this in quite some time I remember I come from line enforcement background and anytime I would take a prisoner to the hospital we used to had the students and I forget the use of dressing like a pink and white or something like that but the students from the high school used to be doing a nurse to the aid class yeah candy stripers yes this this doesn't exist no more and if it doesn't what what do we need to do to bring it back it does it does exist so the students at at uvi they were royal blue now um you know the earliest i'm not sure if the color of the uniform was ever pink but i know it was a very light um blue when i attended and um white and now it's a royal blue and the students from the the high school um program they still they still come but in recent times because of coronavirus i don't think they have been back um but the the registered nurses um from the orange students from the bsm program at uvi have

1:06:27 been in the hospital they're still there doing their clinical rotations we did take half a semester off last year spring when corona hit but um we're back in the hospital um we're grateful for that all right thank you very much my colleagues reminding me that i'm the dinosaur here and those colors that i'm talking about was back then before some of them was going to school so that's why we laughing so and they're like i always gotta take these from these younger folks every time you know but i'll be all right and um you'll be okay i i really appreciate you offering yourself up for service i i think you'll do an excellent job thank you very much thank you very much mr chair thank you very much senator johnson senator joseph you're recognized for your point of inquiry senator joseph you're recognized for your point of inquiry my mic oh here it is thank you it wasn't on before uh thank you kindly media and thank you kindly Senator Potter for the point of inquiry. I wanted to ask you, I know Senator Francis touched on it briefly, the nurse compacture legislation that we have going through the legislature. If you don't know the history, it had went through the vetting process of the Committee of Jurisdiction which Senator John, I'm so sorry, which Senator Francis chairs and this committee, and then the sponsor pulled it when it was going through the committee, the session, the legislative session. Are you familiar with that piece of legislation? And also, I have a point of clarification to Mr. Chairman. I just ask your indulgence kindly.

1:08:18 Briefly, not briefly, but I do, yes, I do have a limited understanding of that legislature that's on the table and I say limited because I don't think I have been aware of it from the beginning of time but recently I've been doing a lot of reading about it it's very interesting because last month no I'm not telling the truth in March I wanted to do some teaching at another university to increase my value to the university of the virgin islands by you know getting experience at other colleges and universities by teaching at a graduate program because we have this master's program the legislature on the on the table um you know that we're discussing and so um you know i want to be able to say yes i have some experience teaching at a master's level and offer whatever knowledge and skills that I have to offer from that experience. So I looked into teaching at other universities on the mainland online. And so one of the things that I needed to have was a license to practice nursing in that state.

1:09:37 And so one of the things I found out that I could do is apply for a compact license. and it it you know i would have to apply for a compact license at another state and these applications they require you to be a resident of the state in order to

apply for their um you know their their their compact or at least the state i was looking at the compact license um to to fill out that compact license application and so um what stopped me from doing it is that i found out you have to be a resident of the state i did ask one of my sisters if i could put down her address but what stopped me is that you know i don't live there and you know that wouldn't be honest and so um i stopped there and then you know this this this discussion about the vibnl and a compact licensure opportunity you know came across my eyesight and so i was very intrigued to see that that opportunity exists because i do think that it would create a lot of um convenience for nurses who are here in the territory to grow you know and and growth happens at home and it also happens outside of home and it doesn't always mean that you know you grow somewhere where else and you won't stay here or you won't come back here sometimes you just need to have other experiences to increase your value um so i am familiar with it but um it's it's a limited limited understanding of all the details thank you so much and i i still value your judgment like i said before i noticed that you have a very good judgment mr chairman one more indulgence if if you'll be so kind just to clarify a question i had asked uh the nominee

1:11:32 very very very briefly senator joseph very briefly thank you so much you're so kind thank you and that's because you're you're a ray for life uh i did contact the board of nurse licensure relative to that question if a practicing nurse can also serve on the board of nurse licensure and they said yes in fact the chairperson the current chairperson is now still practicing in the field of nursing thank you kindly mr chairman for your indulgence thank you thank you very much senator joseph senator gittins you are recognized for your four minutes sir thank you kindly mr chair maybe i'll get some good leniency as well i see that my colleagues are becoming better and better at this each time with all these point of inquiries and leading into all brand new questions good morning to all a special good morning to you uh dr nurse how are you today good morning i'm doing well and yourself i am blessed and highly favored Dr. Nurse as I was reading your resume I'm like wait is she a doctor or is she a nurse which is it but I have reviewed your resume and I find it quite impressive yes I was disappointed in one of your responses but I wouldn't hold it against you at this point you know i don't want to go through the history but

1:13:28 i want you to do that on your own and look to see where especially women of color have come to to have this right to vote don't take it lightly and therefore you can't be one of those in the background complaining when things go wrong but again i wouldn't hold it against you you're being nominated for a very important board here as i'm sure you are aware and i'm pretty sure that you know of the archaic standards and that's been happening with the board are your nurses still required to do their renewals by hand there's nothing uh computerized just yet no not yet so i'd like your thoughts on developing a broader digital platform for the board so what kinds of information do you think should be available to your nurses and placed on your website i think that registered nurses should be able to retrieve, fill out, and submit their application for renewal, not just registered nurses, all nurses, and also submit payment to the VIBNL, you know, through the website. i also think it would be very great and very

1:15:20 attractive of the board to have a status update option on the website where they can click to see the, you know, the status of their renewal process or even their application for license um process that that would also minimize the number of calls that the vibnl receives um from nurses um and you know graduate nurses especially being that there is such minimal you know staff presently there and thank you i heard you say excellent so you you're ready for me to stop talking thank you for that um so you're you're being nominated to this position do you know how long your term is no i thought i saw somewhere at some point two years so i believe it's three but i want you to to tell me that by the end of your term that you will be able to get your other board members to get on board and bring your standards up to where your nurses can do all these transactions remotely and not have to come in.

1:16:49 I love, I love a challenge. You want me to tell you? I will tell, yes, that will happen. Thank you. Mr. Chair, I know time was called, but since I thanked you kindly, can I have some leniency? Yes, you may say that. Thank you, especially as your vice chair. Dr. Nurse, you're familiar with bill number 34, as 0040 which speaks to the nurse licensure compact correct i have a limited understanding of it yes but i am familiar can you tell me if you believe that your nurses can benefit from something like this once is done correctly yes i do believe the nurses can benefit from this can i have your thinking with me can i have your can i have your commitment that once we vote for you that you're going to work with your colleagues to see how we can better this measure so that we can have it as part of our laws to enact the nurse licensure compact one that would benefit all our nurses yes and lastly so i don't totally abuse the time that's allotted. Obviously, the field of nursing presents tremendous opportunities. What can we do to better highlight these opportunities

1:18:39 starting at the middle and high school level? And i know you'll have some good ideas. Don't take it back to the pink and white because we know nothing about that. My colleague showed us his age, but can you just tell me, what can we do better to highlight these opportunities, starting at the middle and high school levels? So, i really believe outreach from the existing RNs, LPNs, and also the students who are currently enrolled in these programs at the Raffaella Wheatley Skills

Center and the UVI-BSN program. I think outreach to these, to all our schools, to this particular population of individuals would highlight the opportunities that exist and so um i think it's important to have the student aspect because it's very easy or or let me not say it's easy oftentimes when we become nurses we forget what the experience was like in nursing school because we're having such a very real challenging experience um actually as an employed nurse and so it's important to have both perspectives um available for the students and at their disposal to ask questions and so i think development of you know very targeted and and well-structured outreach programs would highlight the opportunities very well thank you uh for your response and again i just want to remind you on the board uh we're in the 21st century technology technology technology thank

1:20:29 Thank you. I look forward to supporting your nomination and I'm getting some feedback. I heard you were a very good bedside nurse. Oh, thank you. Keep up the good work. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you. Thank you very much, Senator Gittens. I gave you an extra ten minutes. I hope you're appreciative of that. I just want to thank you kindly, Mr. Chair. Thank you kindly. You're welcome. You're welcome, Senator Giddens.

1:21:10 Dr. Nose, I must say, I'm just very impressed with you. I think as a young professional, a young lady of the soil, your journey through the public educational system, your motivation to seek higher education, your accomplishments for someone so young, your accomplishments have been significant. What, in your view, has been the greatest obstacle or challenge along your journey, and how did you overcome that challenge? I think my greatest obstacle has been maintaining or finding a balance.

1:21:55 So, you know, it's very easy for me to extend mercy and understanding to others. But when it comes to myself, I am very strict when it comes to, you know, the standards that I set as a mother, as a daughter, as an educator, as a friend, as a colleague. And so some days I'm not able to meet that standard in every department of my life. And so, you know, it's been very hard for me. I think that has been my biggest challenge, being able to accept that not every day will I be able to perform at 100% in all the departments of my life. I'm a mother of three, and I had my babies in nursing school, which, you know, added to the challenge. the already existing challenging components of the program. So, you know, it's a very demanding program and commitment. And so is raising a child. And so it's, you know, it's been very challenging to keep that balance because I want to be the perfect mom and I want to be the perfect student and the perfect educator and the perfect, you know, daughter. And so I, you know, I have these very high standards of myself so it's been maintaining that balance and being able to accept you know my imperfections and my shortcomings and move on to the next day and continue to do my best that has been my biggest challenge my biggest obstacle thank you very much Dr. Norris colleagues I think we've exhausted the questions to Dr. Norris at this time point of inquiry Senator Giddens. Thank you, Mr. Chair. This nominee is truly amazing. I like her responses, so I truly want to put her to work already before she gets my vote. There's one other issue with the board. We had a representative here

1:24:04 the other day and when we were discussing the same uh nurse licensure compact i asked specifically about the background checks to be conducted uh on new applicants especially and i i was really taken aback to hear that the board was unable to or not doing background checks I also want a firm commitment from the nominee that when you get on the board, you'll work to this end with your executive director and with our local law enforcement entities that we will be able to conduct background checks. We cannot allow any and anybody to come in here and pose as any medical professional and then find out years later that they don't have those credentials.

1:25:03 So more than an inquiry, I just want to make a statement that this is something that the board needs to get a handle on to start conducting proper background checks, utilizing the law enforcement arm here in the territory. So can I get a commitment for that as well? Yes, I also want to assure you that, or share with you that, in some of my time working at Schneider Regional Medical Center in administration, I worked as the credentialing manager and one of the duties that was a part of my role is to complete background checks on the members of the medical staff.

1:25:50 So not just medical doctors, but also advanced practice registered nurses. So I am aware of the importance of doing those background checks. So Mr. Chair, through the chair, can I ask how was she able to fulfill this, conducting those background checks? Because the board is saying that they can't. So through the chair, how were you able to conduct these background checks?

1:26:20 So, there are different websites that you can use to do background checks, and I want to believe that there are different websites for medical doctors and advanced practice registered nurses than there are for RNs and LPNs. I know that if you go to nurses, you can verify, nurses.com, you can verify licenses. But if you want to check to see if there are any disciplinary actions against a nurse's license, you should be able to do that online by visiting the website of the Board of Nurse Licensure where their original license is from. In terms of criminal background checks, we would have to require them to purchase one of those at you know where they live and and provide that provide a copy to the board thank you and and before we close if if you could uh allow the good vice president to speak on a measure that he had moved

through the legislature which i believe was passed uh the nurse licensure board should have that ability to be able to apply for a portal to to do their own uh ncic checks but the good vice president is here and if you may so that she could be aware as well because we can't accept these uh excuses anymore why we're not conducting background checks on medical professionals in the territory okay you may proceed senator francis thank you very much um mr chair i just wanted to to share and inform that in fact we did have a

1:28:10 request from the Department of Health through Deborah Richardson Peter to allow for the the background check to be done through NCIC and for them to have an authorization access rather than having to rely solely on the police department or the Department of Justice so that they will be able to have access to that the legislation was moved passed and signed into law and is available now to the board of licensure nursing licensure and other boards as well that they could be able to conduct these these background checks there were also during our last committee of health hospital and human services there were some requests made from the board in regards to some funding requirement that we were working towards during the budget process to allow for them to be able to have the necessary access financially to assist with that endeavor thank you very much NCIC is the National Crime Information Center. Thank you. Thank you very much, Senator Francis, absolutely. You have laws on the books, so the key now is, as usual, is implementation of the laws.

1:29:17 Dr. Norse, I promise you that this will come to a close very soon. We appreciate your presence here. we make a motion on your on your nomination I'm going to just ask you to give us a close out 30 second wrap up before we finalize well I wanted to thank all of you for the opportunity it certainly is a privilege and an honor to even be here today and have the opportunity to present to you why I i think you know you should consider me for this this um this role and i want to thank senator francis for highlighting my weaknesses so that i could be held accountable in um addressing them and so um thank you all so much you have my commitment to fulfill all the things that I have a little board here. Would I be an educator if I didn't a blank board that is filled with writing of notes that I took today. So you have my, my, my promise to, you know, follow up, follow up and I'll follow up on all the things that you asked me to follow up on, and to follow through with all of the commitments that I me today thank you again motion thank you very much dr nurse motion senator giddens thank you mr chair and colleagues uh mr chair and colleagues i move that the nomination of celia j nurse be voted upon favorably here in the rules and judiciary committee to serve as a member of the Virgin Islands Board of Nurse Licensure. I so move. Probably moved by Senator Giddens,

1:31:18 seconded by Senator Johnson and Senator Francis. Roll call on the nomination of Dr. Celia Nurse to the Virgin Islands Board of Nurse Licensure. Senator Norville E. Francis, Jr. Yeah. Senator Francis, Jr. Yeah. Senator Kenneth L. Giddens. Yeah. Senator Kenneth Giddens, Yeah. Senator Franklin D. Johnson? Yeah, yeah. Senator Johnson, yeah. Senator Carla Joseph? Yes.

1:31:45 Senator Carla Joseph, yeah. Senator Stephen Payne, Sr. Yes. Senator Payne, Sr., yeah. Senator Milton Potter? Yes. Senator Potter, yeah. Senator Genevieve Whitaker, absent. Mr. Chairman, six yeas, one absent. Thank you, colleagues. The nomination of Dr. Celia Nurse to the Virgin Islands Board of Nurse Licensure has been approved by the Committee on Rules and Judiciary, and will be favorably moved to the full body for further consideration. Congratulations, Dr. Nurse.

1:32:20 Thank you, thank you so much. You're officially released from your presence here today, and you'll be notified when your nomination goes to the full body for consideration so that should be you know in short order well congratulations thank you so much madam clerk can you please read the agenda for black number two the committee on rules and the judiciary now here's a nomination for the vi board of public accountancy nominee deepak banzo cpa thank you very much uh mr banzo are you are you there please turn on your camera yes good morning senator i am here ah good good good morning good morning thank you very much for your presence before we proceed as usual we ask you to raise your right hand just for a brief swearing in yes okay this way that the testimony you're about to give and your responses to the questions posed will be the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth? Yes, I do. Thank you very much. You may proceed. Mr. Banzaad, thank you very much for being here. Thank you very much for your willingness to serve and you may now proceed for with your testimony.

1:34:02 Well, good morning Chairman Milton Potter, Senators on the Committee of Rules and Judiciary and other Senators of the 34th legislature of the Virgin Islands. My name is Deepak Mansal and I would like to thank first Governor Albert Bryan in nominating me to serve on the Virgin Islands Board of Public Accountancy. I have been a licensed certified public accountant for almost 30 years, first passing the exam in the state of Maryland in November 1991 after obtaining a bachelor's of science degree in accounting from the University of Maryland. I also attended a master's in business program at John Hopkins University and later obtained a master's of science in taxation degree from the University of Miami.

- 1:34:54 I have also been a licensed certified public accountant in the state of Florida. When I returned to the U.S. Virgin Islands around year 2000, I also took the local portion of our certified public accountant exam and obtained my license in the virgin islands and have had my license active since then for more than 20 years now i am also a member of the american institute of certified public accountants i grew up and spent my childhood on our beautiful island of st croix and currently three generations of my family called the virgin islands home i am the product of many of our local schools and i'm very proud to have returned home to work and to raise my family. I have been blessed to have a diverse career both the private and public sector. My private sector in the Virgin Islands since around year 2000. I represent a diverse client list of small individuals to large corporate clients providing accounting services tax consulting and preparation and special engagements as needed by clients i have a special emphasis on construction accounting retail accounting and economic development authority compliance i have also had the privilege of being a part-time professor in both accounting and tax courses at the University of the Virgin Islands for approximately three years. My public sector experience includes working in various capacities for Miami-Dade County, including the Audit and Management Services Department, Public Health Trust, which manages Jackson Memorial Hospital, and the Inspector General Office. Locally, I have also proudly worked under two governors as Chief Financial Officer
- 1:36:56 at the public finance authorities virgin islands next generation network overseeing the financial aspects of implementing four federal grants with matching local grants to ensure proper construction of a fiber optic network in the virgin islands i have also worked twice as the chief financial officer of our local community hospital governor juan aflui hospital and medical center i am also a member of various local civic organizations i am both a board member and treasurer of the saint croix chamber of commerce passport member and president of the saint croix tennis club and board member of a religious organization i do believe that the virgin islands board of public accountancy should promote high standards of professional performance for those persons working in public accounting certified public accountants do have high standards for ethics which are very important in maintaining the public trust over the profession the board should also continue to ensure that all local cpas meet guidelines for continuing education and peer review of cpa firms these high standards will continue to assure the public of quality of services offered by local accountants board needs to ensure these guidelines are kept current and in line with other national standards such as from the ai cpa american institute of cpas the board's current use of national state board of accountancy it's also known as nasba for licensing renewal of local cpas has been very efficient and should be continued
- 1:38:42 Thank you, Chairman Milton Potter, Senators on the Committee of Rules and Judiciary, and other Senators of this body, for your time and consideration for my nomination to the Virgin Islands Board of Public Accountancy. Thank you very much for your testimony, Mr. Banzau. Colleagues, we will proceed with our four-minute round. We'll start with our colleague, Senator, the at-large Senator from out of St. John, senator stephen payne senator payne please proceed thank you very much for the time mr chair good morning nominee bansal how are you doing well sir thank you okay good first off um let me know in your in short term short order what have you done to prepare to serve on the board of public accountancy specifically well i've read i've read the enabling legislation um that mr potter's office has forwarded to me um and i'm familiarized with with that legislation and have you reached out to other board members i know i didn't get your response i apologize no i know i have not reached out to other board members okay do you know the other board members i know the yes the one representing saint croix and the one of them representing saint thomas i do know okay okay uh next question um what do you consider as your strengths or your weaknesses well i think my strengths have um been that i'm i like to i'm very hard working and i'd like to find out um right to the detail of what is involved
- 1:40:37 in how to best accomplish a project um whether it be uh to save uh clients some uh on on tax consulting what is the best way uh what is the the correct uh legal way uh i think that is my has been my strength always that i try to dive in and make sure that the best outcome is achieved through the law any weaknesses i would say probably my weakness is that probably i have uh gotten a little um emotionally involved in some things especially um um you know uh when i've worked in the public sector i i do become passionate i am a passionate person on certain a lot of matters and for when it comes to my community and all that and uh sometimes it's it's been difficult to you know uh see views that just aren't really uh representing of all the facts okay thank you for your response and uh and what are three areas of concern that you would uh like to address as a board member of the um vi board of public accountancy Well, first of all, I think I would continue one of the things. I would continue the use of the Internet. It's a very efficient process, I could tell you, as a practicing accountant, the licensing renewal process and for new individuals. And I think that should be continued. We do not have enough certified public accountants in the territory, I believe. we should make the process streamlined as it is through the internet efficient. There is a NASBA, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, that we're using right now, which I think has been very helpful. It's a national state boards of accountancy. So they look at your education that continuing education that uh the board had just recently started recently prior to hurricane maria it's not that recent probably around 2015 i i would estimate where we started having a requirement for continuing education and that was

not one of the requirements in the past like other states have and I think that move and that continued requirement of continuing education is very important tax laws accounting rules that we have to follow promulgated by you know FASB you know financial accounting standards board that those are the way we present our financial statements those are changing all the time. CPAs need to know how to present those financial statements

1:43:31 in accordance with those GAAP rules. And of course, as you all know, tax laws is consistently changing. So that continuing education, I think, is very important. The other thing, I think, maintenance of a lot of the standards to national standards is uh very important um uh there's there's some there's ethic rules for independence uh all need to be uh i think um as they are have become with with our virgin alice board uh very similar to national standards uh there's now also a peer review process in place which i think has been very helpful it's a little cumbersome uh you you have to go to another cpa firm who specializes kind of in just reviewing doing a peer review of your work papers but i think that does at the end of the day improve quality it ensures that we document everything uh correctly in our work papers so it's actually i find kind of helpful in that regard for future documentation and support if we needed to support why we chose a certain way we chose to handle a financial matter we have that documentation so I think those are some of the things that I would continue to do that the board has has been doing very effectively I think thank you very much for your response thank you very much for the time mr. chair thank you very much Senator Payne. Senator Carla Joseph, you are recognized for your four minutes. Thank you kindly Mr. Chairman for the time. Mr. Banzell, my questions are going to be surrounding your efforts over the years to provide opportunities to guide others into a similar field that you are in accounting CPA could you

1:45:37 please be so kind to delineate on your efforts and specifically state who are your mentees correctly or who you have mentored in the past good good morning senator Joseph yeah well thank you for that question I think it's it's very important to have to do that and to continue do that as I said earlier I do believe we do not have enough certified accountants in our community and I think it's a very important function that CPAs do to make sure the financials are all presented in a uniform manner so banks can follow I think it's very important for the number of CPAs to actually increase that will help the private sector a lot, including the public sector. I have worked at UVI. I have always, for about three years, I've taught various accounting courses and various, I think one or two tax courses. And I've always encouraged students to make sure Can he not hear me?

1:46:48 They go that extra mile to pass, to take the exam. There is a lot of reluctance that I have found. December, hello? Hola, hola, como esta? We are hearing you, Senator Joseph. We are hearing you clearly, but Mr. Vance, the testifier was speaking at the time, so. Yes, and I just wanted to, because my time is limited, that you have allowed me, and I don't want to take advantage you anymore but i just wanted to ask him clearly uh to if he could just be succinct and get to the point and who has he mentored and who is currently mentoring is he currently mentoring any uh persons just just be succinct because i have a follow-up question oh yes i apologize for for taking so long um yes i have mentored students when i was teaching i am currently uh always encouraging uh bookkeepers that i work with other accountants that i work with uh to people that i've worked with in various places to make sure they go that extra mile and take the CPA exam. It's a national exam, so it's not in addition to that national exam, we do have a local portion because our tax laws are different. So I am currently for lots of individuals, we need more.

1:48:13 Well, you have answered my, I'm satisfied with your response, Mr. Banzal, and you have mentored individuals, and I'm hearing from you legitimately that you have continued to mentor and encourage other individuals, but you know, mentoring is not just here today. Mentoring, when you're a mentor, it's a forever commitment. Now, tell me, are you familiar with the other half of a CPA, and it's a counterpart with is CMA. Do you know the difference? Yeah, that's a certified management accountant. CPA has been traditionally the that's sometimes CMA is used for if you're working within a company, that is a very useful designation. Also, the CPA is the more it's a public accountant, of course, you know, and it's a license to be able to practice in front of the IRS if you need be. It's to sign off on financial statements. And that is, I would say, would be the ultimate goal for most accountants to achieve. The CPA versus the CMA, correct? But both of them are state-issued Accountant Certification, correct? I'm not sure if the CMA is issued locally. I think that is a national... It's not issued here locally.

1:49:46 No, it's not usually a public accountant where you represent individuals from the public. That's my understanding. The CPA is the one that you can represent the public, and that is the one that... It is a national exam, but that is the one that you go to licensing and get your license from. Okay, thank you so much. I appreciate it. My time has expired. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, for your leeway and your indulgence. Thank you, Mr. Banzal, as well. Thank you very much, Senator Joseph. Senator Francis, you're recognized for your four minutes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. um mr banzal thank you for your willingness to want to serve on on this board of virgin islands board of public accountancy uh so i wanted to ask you in regards to your suitability on this board um you know speak to some of the strengths that you

believe that you possess and will bring to this board based on your your qualifications thank you senator for francis for that question uh i do believe i have a a long history of being a certified public accountant i do believe that the profession uh needs to continue uh we're held to a high ethical standard where people we're dealing with people's and businesses monies uh we have to be able to make sure we correctly and honestly apply the tax rules uh we are expected to be honest brokers even from the government's perspective from the irs irb locally uh that we're we are going to be doing the correct thing and i am a firm believer in that uh the the the the profession is a trustworthy profession and i think that when you go to a cpa versus it's that additional step that you are getting somebody who is a qualified individual has taken the continuing educations to know the current laws has gone that extra step and i think that's that's what i bring to the table i bring that experience of both the public and private sector and how to really continue to make sure are that the cpas we have in the virgin islands continue to make sure they perform at a high at a high at a high level okay very well and under questioning from your um application and the background check that have been done by the office of um senator milton potter um in regards to your background check in fact uh you sit here today and in good standings with dlca uh irb um or on some form of a payment plan is you are you in good standing no payment plan yeah i am in good standing yes sir very well standing with licensing and irb very well and irs

1:52:56 and in your application as well there was a question of conflict of interest uh is it your position and your testimony today that you're in no way in conflict of interest with any business or any other thing that's doing work with the government that will present a conflict for you? Yes, sir. I do not currently have any work that I'm performing for the government of Virgin Islands or licensing. If a situation would come, I would make sure I recuse myself if that's what's required.

1:53:34 Very well. And in your work with VINGN as the CFO from 2014 to 2016, were there any issues or concern there when you separated from that particular entity? Did you leave there with, again, a good separation? Yes, I did leave with a good separation. The project, I'm proud to say, we implemented at the time four of the largest grants that the Virgin Islands had received from the federal government to complete the construction. The project was halted before the CEO and I had come on board. And subsequent to that, I understand there's been audits of the VINGN, and there's been no pullback as far as I have heard.

1:54:31 So very proud of my work there. My time has been called, Mr. Chair, can I ask for just one follow-up question? You may proceed, Senator Francis. Thank you very much. In regards to weaknesses, can you speak to any weakness that you believe, obviously we have strength and you spoke about your strengths a lot today, but what do you believe is something that um in terms of weakness and those things that that draw your blood those things that really bother you um even with this designation as a as a nominee to a particular board um can you speak to challenges or weaknesses that you have um i'll be honest with you um i'm not a huge fan of coming on publicly speaking uh i'm a private individual uh um i think that my my weakness is that i i have gotten passionately involved in some of the things i've done especially at the hospital and um you know i i i things bother me when i when i read things that maybe have been not correctly portrayed or it's not in the best interest of the community but you know um i have continued to make sure that i just do my best and leave the rest to god and um and just continue to do the best for the community and my my family and uh that's that's how i've i've my motto is very well um thank you uh for your responses thank you mr chair for the opportunity thank you very much senator francis senator johnson you're recognized for your four minutes good morning mr banzel i must start off by saying thank you for offering your self-service but I am very tentative listener and two of my colleagues in

1:56:31 line of questioning you you continuously referring to I think of articles or information in media that that's that's not true or correct is there something you would like to expunge on in that matter that you continue alluring to Well, Senator Johnson, not anything in particular, but I think one of the things that I was alluding to was that when I was at the hospital, I did have a process where I thought our physician model was different than what we currently have in both hospitals. And I have just made sure that my views are clear and not to be against any individuals or physicians, but I just passionately thought that we needed to be on a different path. And I do understand that maybe sometimes some individuals didn't like that view, but I gave it after studying different hospital systems, including the one I worked at in Miami. But for that reason, I just believe we had some of the issues that we do have at our local hospitals. And I still am a passionate advocate of health care. I do believe it's very important health care having a proper system in health care system in place and it's something that I'm very passionate about all right what new ideas would you like to implement to the board if you are confirmed I would like to make sure we continue to follow national standards like those promulgated by American Institute of CPAs the the board I believe has already done a great job on following a lot of those national standards there's reciprocity from other states for including if you were licensed in Florida for example you you can get it here also in the Virgin Islands and vice versa I think that is obviously very important to continue because there's one national exam and we want to make sure that the CPAs for example we did not have the requirement for that continuing education here which other states did so when you were to go back to florida or to another state that had these requirements uh sometimes you would have to uh prove or start again uh taking the required courses for that year you

you cannot uh because our state didn't have that requirement uh we weren't meeting the what as most other states were requiring to meet uh we have to almost start again uh at these different states and i think maintenance of those national standards are important for those reasons also so that we can have cpas come here also as as and and the practicing cpas can do work also in the united states yeah well you kind of answer my second question but i would still ask it um because it's based on your statement you said the board should also continue to ensure that all local cpas meet guidelines for continuing education and peer review

1:59:39 of cpa firms so that's what you was alluded to in your statement yes yes sir um i do believe both are important both are required by um other states and the peer review by american institute of cpas and um what that does for example on the continuing education part we make sure it's clear like florida requires us to do a certain number of continuing education per year and then they have a recertification i think every two years um and um the years before from 2015 or 2014 exactly yeah i'm not don't quote me on please we didn't have that same requirement so going back to florida for me for example getting my license renewed there would almost i would have to just prove that i have taken those educations for the last two years because our state the virgin Nile State did not have those same requirements as Florida did in all these years. So I think that standardization is very important so that there's no issue if you want to get your license in another state and back and forth.

2:00:48 Mr. Chair, can I have one more question with your indulgence? Yes, you may, Senator. Thank you kindly. Mr. Banzan, my final question, and I would like for you to seriously dig into this one can you give an example of when your ethics was challenged um it's it's it's challenged a specific example would be with with clients i there's instances where the client is not happy with the outcome maybe it's a it's a tax matter um that they thought they would be able to do a certain thing and i've had to come and tell them that you know listen i'm not gonna sign off on it if it's if it's not done in the way that i read the law especially if it's a black and white issue um and um things like that and things with representing the financial statements have come up where we have to present a a financial transaction in a certain way and sometimes the client may not be happy with with that uh way but you know you you have to do it according to the rules for social you those have been challenges always um and um you have to stick to the law thank you very much i really appreciate your candid answers thank you very much mr chair thank you very much senator johnson senator joseph you're recognized for your point of inquiry Thank you.

2:02:22 Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. As always, you're really a gracious chair. I wanted to first, of course, commend Mr. Deepak Bansal before I began my point of inquiry and ask if you can compare, based on your resume, compare for us working in the private sector, which I see that you have spent a long time working, especially for GEC LLC and also for your own company to those in the public sector. How is your work and what do you see that you can bring as far as our efficiency and productivity to this board based on your experience and and lesson learned in the field in comparing those two sectors?

2:03:19 Thank you, Senator Joseph, that's a very good question. I tell you, having worked in both, in the private sector, everything is usually efficiency. So we call something in accounting internal controls. And, you know, the more internal controls you have in a system of accounting, It's more costly to have that internal control, but the outcome is usually that you have a better outcome. You have, and I give you a specific example, you know, a separation of duty is one internal control. One standard, you would want not the same person to be able to write the check and also then sign the check, approving the transaction. You would want to have a separation of duty as that's an internal control where two individuals are doing it rather than one so in the private sector of course you know you see things and you say okay well how what size of company is this uh is it a is it a uh a company where there's other shareholders who who have uh uh maybe uh there's not a trust issue but when it comes to the public sector uh some of those efficiencies may not come into play you may need no matter what a separation of duty because it's public monies you're dealing with and those controls is not deciding whether to implement those controls or not is not only based on the most efficient way maybe it may be just that you need a separation of duty even for a smaller government organization you just need to make sure those internal controls are are there in place so there is different challenges i think i i've seen it from both sides of course you have to bring efficiency to government too i'm not saying implying that that's not necessary there but there's other competing factors i think in the in the public sector where you know if you're dealing with the public's money especially in accounting you you'll want to make sure that the internal controls are are more solid uh um because because of those reasons so that uh and a separation of duties would be the perfect example. Thank you so kindly, Mr. Bansal, for your

2:05:36 expert opinion based on your lessons learned. I agree with you. Those are the internal control, fiscal controls that sometimes we need to put in place to not only bring efficiency, but also bring integrity and trust to the management of money. Thank you so kindly, and thank you mr chairman thank you very much senator joseph senator giddens you're recognized for your four minutes thank you mr cheer i'm beginning to wonder if this is going to be a habit uh mr banzel

uh being that you were in the hot seat several times I want to say again like my other colleagues thank you for your willingness to sit in the seat again I know you've worked with GFL and VINGN for some time and we've had some issues in those areas. However, seeing that, reviewing your resume and seeing that you've worked in other jurisdictions, how do the VA licensing requirements for accountants compare to other jurisdictions in your thoughts?

2:07:09 Well, Senator Gaines, first of all, thank you for recognizing that. I've been in the hot seat. It's been tough, but I truly believe when I said yes, that I would do this volunteer job, that I do care about my profession, and it's a way of kind of giving back and making sure that our profession has the high standards. So I appreciate you acknowledging that. I think I think compared to other municipalities and states, I should say, that I have worked in and gotten licenses in both Maryland and in Florida, we have one added requirement, which I don't think is out of place. We have an added local exam part of the, in addition to the standard exam, you need to pass a local exam. And I think that is necessary. It's not prohibitive for individuals to, once they pass the national exam, which is a much more difficult exam, that local part is addressing our local laws, the way we, as a territory, interact with the federal government in terms of our taxation which is unlike other states it's unlike maybe if you're a resident of Florida or Georgia or Pennsylvania and there's still one federal government but our relationship is completely different of course as you know so um that local portion is a necessary thing i i think um i don't think it's prohibitive i i know i could speak for Florida they had a requirement that you needed almost a master's to become a um a CPA in the state of Florida they required 150 credit hours of education so it's essentially a bachelor's and a master's um uh and Maryland did not require that so i had that's where i had graduated from when i left St. Croix for college and um i took it there but i was not going to even be able to take it in Florida uh if i until i passed a master's so i don't think we are uh over overly uh prohibitive in in in

2:09:13 encouraging our students and our accountants once they pass UVI or any university with an accounting degree to sit for the exam. That's how I see it. So what will be at least two of your recommendations for changing or updating our licensing requirements here in the territory? Just at least two because I don't want you to take up all the time. Yeah well i'll be honest with you i i think the use of internet there's when something is not broken it doesn't maybe require a lot of fixing i i truly believe that our system uh having interfaced with it myself is very efficient um we have this national accounting standards board which um kind of you know clearly there's no it's just just do you have have you met the requirements that the vi board has has stated you needed you need this ethics course you need x amount of continuing education and it's been very good so i i can't say that as a practice CCP i would change that i'm going to be super honest i i think the system is working so to your response we have a perfect uh scenario here and there's no uh need for any changes well i mean there's there's always continuous updates. I believe the profession is continuing to update. There might new updates that the American Institute of CPAs is doing. We would still have to continually adapt to any new requirements upon the profession. We should make sure we follow along with those adoptions also. So I wouldn't say that we don't have to continuously improve it but i i do believe that our licensing uh methodology is is very efficient at for CPAs right now thank you if i may wrap up with one question Mr. Chair yes you may send it to get us

2:11:11 so uh Mr. Banzal we we we know that the field has changed uh quite a bit with regards to technology and that the tax code is complicated and evolving. I think we can agree on that. So what kind of continuing education programs are required once you're a CPA? Are there any requirements? Yes, sir.

2:11:41 You're absolutely right. The tax law has continuously changing, especially even with the past year. We've had two or three major federal legislations that affect us here in the Virgin Islands. Obviously, we follow the, we call it the mirror tax code system. And I'll give you a specific example. When we first started doing tax returns earlier this year, there was not a break given for unemployment benefits. And in the last coronavirus package, a law that was passed, there was an exemption, I think, for \$10,200. The first \$10,200 is not going to be taxed. So that continuous education is so important so you make sure your client is making sure you're within the law getting them the best deal because that's not something the IRS or IRB are going to tell you that, oh, you know, by the way, you're claiming too much here. I think the onus is upon the accountant to continuously, not only when they're redoing their license, I mean to say, every year. It's a continuous process, and that's just the tax issues. There's a whole bunch of accounting rules that we call GAP, generally accepted accounting principles, that are established from the FASB board that I mentioned that consistently change also and they have a new one for maybe how to recognize revenue for certain type of companies and those need to be consistently studied constantly studied uh so that you know you are doing the the most correct way for your client so that education i would say is a continuous thing not just during your annual recycle you know when you go for renewing your license Thank you for your response. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

2:13:47 Thank you very much, Senator Giddens. Mr. Banzal, you mentioned earlier that in your view we have insufficient CPAs in our territory locally. Approximately, what does that number look like as far as CPAs in the Virgin Islands? I don't have the exact information from licensing, but my guess would be the number of firms that are operating are probably around

20 is what I would imagine. Okay. What can we do, if anything? You may have some insights, and what might we be able to do to steer more locals who may be interested in the field of accountancy?

2:14:36 what can we do to steer more folks in the direction of the CPA being becoming a CPA yes yeah it's a it's a difficult question because III I think the financial incentives are there because once you're a I'll answer to say once you become a CPA you're obviously you have a designation a license which you become worth more to account in your accounting field. So I think that exists. I think what we can do is to continue to promote, I think, at UVI's level, the college level, once we have accountants who are studying accounting, to make sure they do that added step to take the exam. I mean, I don't think the exam is a standardized national exam, so there's not really much change we could do over there. But I think the encouragement right at UVI, continuing to support UVI. It's a very good accounting program that I have seen. The quality of students at UVI is amazing. My wife, she has done her bachelor's of science degree in accounting from uvi and her mba and i i tell you uh we are we are fantastic and i think that is where we could continue as a community to support uvi uh in encouraging these students and once they become a graduate to go that extra mile uh and take the cpa exam there um that is probably the best place where we could get them because what happens after you graduate and if you don't take it right away, some things naturally, you know, you forget all the exact, there's a lot of nuances, a lot of rules questioned on these exams. It's, I advise people, the best time to take it is right after you graduate, you know, things are fresher in your mind, all the auditing rules. So I think continuous support for UVI would be, I think, the best way to continue to encourage more of our students to become, take that extra step, extra mile to become a CPA.

2:16:56 Excellent. I think it's a very good idea. I think just the idea of capturing those folks when they are still there in the university environment, and maybe the business school just focusing and emphasizing that, you know, yes, you're here to graduate with your degree, but to really aspire to the pinnacle of the accounting field you know we should be steering you in a direction towards taking and passing your CPA exam so I don't know if it's geared if the UVI program is sort of geared towards you know every step of the way encouraging and steering them towards you know the the CPA process but I think that's something that we are to definitely look into yes and you've had a long and prestigious and successful career in the field what has been your that you can share with us what has been to this point your greatest obstacle or challenge that you can share with us and how have you overcome this challenge I think I know you won't prepare for that one today, right? I'm sorry, Shunner, last part? No, I'm saying I know you weren't prepared for that question, but. No, it's a very good question. I really think one of the biggest challenges that I have faced and continues to face is making sure I do the right thing, you know, whether it be in public setting whether it be you're representing your client you know it's it's you i think our profession is different of cpas rather than uh for example an attorney no pun intended to any attorneys here but our our profession seeks to look at the rules and make sure your client is making sure they follow the rules that have been that have been uh uh stated uh maybe an attorney

2:19:00 is going to see how he can move, and to a certain extent, a CPA in a tax perspective, how we can move those rules to our favor. But at the end of the day, a big part of a CPA's job is when you look at the financial statements, for example, are you in compliance with the GAAP rules? Have you depreciated your assets the way that has been specified in the rules? Have you on, I think the biggest obstacle is sometimes telling clients that, you know, I'm sorry, but this position that you want to take is just not possible. And it's difficult, especially if it's a tax matter. Some people may not like to hear that, you know, that, no, you cannot do this. You cannot, you know, file it this way. There is a lot of duty, I believe, on our part, correctly so, that we do it the right way and to maintain that integrity that the profession has. So I think that is one of the biggest obstacles. There are all kinds of clients, obviously, you know, and you don't want to lose business, but sometimes, you know, to make sure you're respected over in our small community. You got to take sometimes the hard decisions because, you know what, I don't think we're a perfect fit for each other. And that is probably the biggest obstacle, I bet you, that faces a lot of CPAs who want to continue to be ethical and do the right thing. Absolutely. Thank you very much for that.

2:20:32 I concur. Ultimately, all you have is your good name and reputation. So I respect that greatly. Colleagues, we've exhausted this round. we will, um, proceed to a motion. Is there, is there a motion? Senator Joseph, you're recognized for your motion. Mr. Chairman, I move that the nomination of Deepak Banzal to the Virgin Islands board of public accountancy be favorably voted upon in this committee and forwarded to the full body for further consideration.

2:21:15 I so move. Properly moved by Senator Joseph, seconded by Senator Francis. Roll call on the nomination of Mr. Deepak Banzal, CPA, to the Virgin Islands Board of Public Accountancy. Senator Norville E. Francis Jr. Senator Francis Jr. Yeh. Senator Kenneth L. Giddens. Senator Kenneth L. Giddens, Yeh. Senator Franklin D. Johnson. Yes.

2:21:43 Senator Johnson, yay. Senator Karla J. Joseph? Yes. Senator Karla Joseph, yay. Senator Stephen D. Payne, senior. Senior. Yes. Senator Payne, senior, yay. Senator Milton E. Potter? Yes. Senator Potter, yay. Senator Genevieve Whitaker? Yes. Absent. Mr. Chairman, six yays, one absent. Thank you very much. Colleagues, the nomination of Mr.

Deepak Banzal to the Virgin Islands Board of Public Accountancy has been approved by the Committee on Rules and Judiciary and will be favorably moved to the full body for further consideration. Congratulations, Mr. Banzal, and I'll give you 30 seconds just to offer your closing remarks.

2:22:30 Well, thank you all, senators of the Rules and Judiciary Committee. I do appreciate your trust that you have placed in me in uh in approving me um I assure you that I will try my best to continue to make sure our rules for our CPAs are correctly applied to national standards and I do once again appreciate the trust you place in me thank you very much sir you are officially released from this uh this session congratulations Colleagues, we'll take a one-minute recess.

2:23:35 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Okay, colleagues, the nomination of Mr. Deepak Banzal, we're out of recess, and the nomination of Mr. Deepak Banzal was moved by Senator Francis, I mean moved by Senator Joseph, sorry, seconded by Senator Francis, and was favorably forwarded out of the Committee on Rules and Judiciary to the full body for further consideration.

2:25:48 We'll now proceed back into a two-minute recess. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. The Committee on Rules and Judiciary is back on the record. Madam Clerk, can you please read the agenda for Block No. 3?

2:29:11 The Committee on Rules and Judiciary will now consider the nomination for Ms. Cherise Woods Esquire for the Virgin Islands Parole Board. Thank you very much. Good afternoon, Senator Pollard. Excellent. We're seeing you and we're hearing you. Welcome to your nomination session. Before we proceed, as is customary, I would ask you to raise your right hand. Do you swear or affirm that the testimony you're about to give and your responses to to all questions posed will be the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth yes thank you very much attorney woods you may proceed with your testimony thank you very much good morning chairman Milton Potter and other members of the committee on rules and judiciary of the 34th legislature of the United States Virgin Islands other senators present and members of the listening and viewing audience my name is attorney Sharice Woods and I appear before you today to provide a personal statement in support of my application for membership onto the Virgin Islands Board of Parole. It is my belief that my experiences, both educational and professional, make me an exceedingly qualified candidate to serve the people of the Virgin Islands as a member of this board. I received my Bachelor of Arts degree in Biochemistry and my Master of Science degree in forensic science from the Duquesne University in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania and I received my

2:31:08 jurist doctorate degree from the DePaul University College of Law in Chicago Illinois over a period of approximately 12 years I have worked primarily in the criminal law and the criminal justice field I began my professional career with the New York City Police Department as a forensic scientist, where I was assigned to the controlled substance analysis section of the crime laboratory. While there, I worked closely with assistant district attorneys who were prosecuting drug cases and oftentimes testified as an expert witness. After discovering my interest in becoming an attorney, I relocated to Chicago to attend Law School at DePaul, where I developed an undoubted interest in criminal law. During my time as a law student, I interned in the Criminal Division at the Cook County State's Attorney's Office, one of the largest prosecuting bodies in the United States. My desire to diversify my work experience led me to the Richmond County Public Defender's Office in Augusta, Georgia, where I worked as a felony investigator. In this role, I interacted with defendants who were charged with felony crimes and assisted public defenders in the development of criminal defenses.

2:32:41 In 2018, when I returned home to St. Thomas, I accepted a position as an assistant attorney general in the criminal division with the Virgin Islands Department of Justice, where I had the opportunity to prosecute general as well as white collar crimes. The following year, in 2019, I accepted a teaching position at the University of the Virgin Islands, where I taught the criminology and the criminal law courses. As a result of my teaching experience, I have been kept up to date with the recent trends and developments in criminal law and the criminal justice system. Through my experience in the prosecution and defense of major crimes, I have developed a keen understanding of the criminal justice system and what it represents as it relates to punishment and rehabilitation. And I can imagine that this understanding is a highly sought after quality that one would expect to find in a parole board member. As a native of these Virgin Islands, I would say that I have a substantial interest in seeing eligible persons reintegrated back into the community and ensuring that persons who are likely to reoffend are not given the same opportunity. I have a clear understanding of what the parole evaluation process entails and I firmly believe that I would be a tremendous asset to this board.

2:34:24 Mr. Chair, this concludes my statement. I sincerely thank you for the opportunity to come before you and the other members of the Committee on Rules and Judiciary, and I remain available to answer any questions that either of you may have. Thank you. Thank you very much for your testimony, Attorney Woods. We will proceed, colleagues, with a four-minute round, starting with the at-large senator, Senator Stephen Payne. Thank you very much for the time, Mr. Chair. Good morning, Attorney Woods. Good afternoon, Senator Payne.

- 2:35:08 You look slightly familiar. Yeah. I think I may have seen you dancing the year before, Dancing with the Stars. That was you? How about CHS High School? I did. I did participate in the Sparks Youth Group Dancing with the Stars competition, and I was the first runner-up. Oh, congrats, congrats, congrats, congrats. Thank you. I knew your family was really, really proud of you.
- 2:35:37 As a young person growing up in the territory, was it always your dream or your desire to become an attorney? It was not. I did not develop the desire to pursue a career as an attorney until after I had worked with the New York City Police Department. As I indicated, part of my duties with NYPD were to testify as an expert witness in cases that involve narcotics and other controlled substances. So having been in that environment for the three years that I did work at NYPD, I would say that that is what opened the door for me to learning that I wanted to become an attorney.
- 2:36:23 Okay, thank you very much for that answer. What have you done to prepare yourself to actually serve on the V.I. Parole Board? Outside of the qualifications that I have that I believe make me a good candidate for the board, I've read all of the statutes that pertain to the Virgin Islands Parole Board that were forwarded to me by Senator Potter's office in preparation for this hearing. I did attempt to reach out to a parole board member.
- 2:37:00 I was unsuccessful with that. But, you know, just trying to familiarize myself with the legal statutes that pertain to the parole board, I would say has been the extent of my preparation thus far. Okay, thank you for that. And as someone who's going into to be a member of this board, are there any offenses that you can think of that an offender can commit where you would always say no to that inmate who is applying for parole? No, I cannot say that there are any offenses that would cause me to just down outright reject an applicant's petition for parole.
- 2:37:52 The law is very clear on the individuals who are eligible for parole. And if I am confirmed and I do become a member of the board, I would be, of course, bound by those laws. and bound by the rules and regulations of the parole board to review every application with the same level of vigor and just afford every candidate the same opportunity.
- 2:38:24 Okay, and you mentioned in your testimony an ability to differentiate between an inmate who has been rehabilitated and deserves parole versus someone who does not. Do you believe our penal system, as currently structured, is effective in helping inmates become rehabilitated and ready to become productive citizens? I would say so. I think that there are measures in place by the Bureau of Corrections here in the Virgin Islands and the correctional facilities abroad, where many of the parolees are currently housed. I believe that those facilities do have measures in place that would prepare inmates to be reintegrated back into society.
- 2:39:09 For example, the individuals who are there and they don't have a high school education or college education, I believe that there are programs in there to equip those individuals with that level of education. I am aware that in some of the facilities, at least the ones that are stateside, where parolees are currently housed, they are equipped with trade programs that provide those types of skills for inmates that are currently housed in those facilities. And I believe that those things, the education and the equipment with some type of trade, would certainly be a good start at allowing those individuals to be reintegrated back into society where they can then become productive members. Okay, and lastly, what are your thoughts on granting parole to an inmate who has not obtained a diploma or GED or even acquired any skills or any trades while being incarcerated?
- 2:40:16 I would certainly try to incorporate that into one of the conditions. It was something that I did as a prosecutor when I was drafting plea agreements for defendants who had not obtained a GED or high school diploma. It was something that I had incorporated into the plea agreement just to make it mandatory for them to complete that um i do believe that having at least that level of education is is necessary and is beneficial excuse me to be a functioning member in the community so to the extent of my authority or my power if you will as a parole board member it is something that I would factor into the agreement to make it a requirement that they at least pursue GED.
- 2:41:19 All right. Thank you for your answer. And just for the record, colleagues, I actually personally know attorney was saying she was an infant and I'm very proud of the young lady that she has grown up to be and as well as her parents. Her mother is extremely proud of her and look forward to this day uh thank you very much for the time mr chair and definitely you know you have my support attorney woods thank you very much senator pain thank you very much senator pain senator joseph you're recognized for your four minutes Thank you so much Mr. Chairman. First I would like to say good afternoon to the nominee Miss Charisse Renee Woods and to commend you for being courageous enough and to taking this leap to one return back home to provide services to your community as well as to serve on the Virgin Islands Board of Parole for the St. Thomas and St. John District. My deepest appreciation and commendation for your courage to take on this additional task. I want to let you know that I read your resume and I really see that you are a young person who have shown a deep passion for criminal justice and justice on a whole. Now my question is going to be very clear and focused on your understanding of the parole evaluation process. In your testimony you said you have a clear

understanding of what the parole evaluation process entails be succinct in your response in detailing that understanding that you have arrived at based on your readings yes thank you very much for your kind words Senator Joseph my clear understanding of what the parole evaluation process entails

2:43:42 certainly stems from the experience that I have gathered from my time at the Department of Justice as a criminal prosecutor. That evaluation process is very similar in nature to the evaluation process that prosecutors use when they are recommending a sentence or when they are recommending bail conditions or pre-trial conditions, pre-trial release conditions, things of that nature. One of the things that we want to focus on is whether or not the individual is a danger to the community. So, of course, from a parole board standpoint, you would want to evaluate whether or not this individual has truly been rehabilitated. Have they taken responsibility for their actions? Do they have a propensity of reoffending when they are released on parole? Are they capable of being a productive member of society? And, of course, we're able to get answers from these questions from many different sources, paperwork that may be submitted to us from the Office of Probation, or, in this case, paperwork that would be submitted to us from the correctional facility where the parolee is housed. You know, we would have access to a record where we would be able to evaluate their conduct for the time that they have been incarcerated. What have they done since their term of incarceration that proves that they are ready to be released from custody and integrated back into society? We also would take into consideration victims' impact statements. So one of the things that I would say is required is, you know, someone required of a parole board member is someone who was able to objectively listen to these victims' impact statements and weigh them against the other evidence that may be presented to us as parole board members, for example. So there are a number of sources from which I would gather information to see whether an individual has been rehabilitated and whether they're ready to reenter society.

2:46:07 Thank you so much, Ms. Woods, Attorney Woods, for your explanation. And you are very thorough and succinct. Mr. Chairman, I won't abuse my time. Thank you so much for your leniency and your leeway. Thank you. Thank you very much, Senator Joseph. Senator Francis, you are recognized for your four minutes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to Attorney Woods for your willingness to serve on this board. I wanted to engage you a little bit this afternoon, because obviously you come from a prosecutorial side of the House.

2:46:45 How do you reconcile that some of those individuals that you may be considering for parole might have been prosecuted by the Department of Justice? Well, I can imagine that a vast majority of those individuals would have been prosecuted by the Department of Justice. I have worked at the Department of Justice for a very short time, a little over two years. So I can imagine that some of the individuals that will come up for parole at some point may have even been prosecuted by me.

2:47:24 So those were things that I took into consideration when I was submitting my application for consideration onto this board. And I reconcile that by saying this. I am not a gung-ho prosecutor, so much so that I will be precluded from objectively reviewing an individual's parole application. Like I did want to highlight in my statement, I do have experience as well working with the Public Defender's Office. So, you know, I've been in the field. I've been eye to eye with some of these defendants that have committed some very heinous crimes, and I am prepared to deal with whatever comes my way. I know what is required of a parole board member with respect to your ability to remain objective and to review the evidence that is before you and that is all I can say that I would do if a situation like that presented itself before me do you have a perspective on second chance and second chance program uh do you believe that there is sufficient being done um to ensure uh that our uh inmates our individual that may serve in sentences that they're provided with some level of rehabilitation and re-entry into our community um to answer your first question I do believe in second chance programs having worked with the public defender's office in augusta georgia i've seen the benefit of those programs, I've seen the hope that those programs have afforded to individuals that were released from prison. So as a result of my personal experience with those programs, I would support

2:49:17 them and I would say that I do believe in them. To your second question as to whether I feel as though enough is being done, I'm assuming you mean here in the Virgin Islands, to facilitate those programs. I cannot speak to that directly, as I'm not sure exactly what measures have been put in place to facilitate those programs here in the Virgin Islands. But I would say that I do support them. And if I am confirmed today for membership onto the board, it is certainly one of the primary tasks that I hope to begin working on.

2:50:03 Do you believe in half houses, halfway houses, in terms of, again, as individuals that transitioning out of the prison environment back into our community, that there should be some level of transition rather than just putting them back into the same environment that got them into prison in the first place? I do. I do believe in halfway houses for the simple fact that many of these individuals who are up for parole have spent a significant amount of time incarcerated. You know, they spent a significant amount of time having to obey orders and not being able to have the general freedoms or the

small freedoms that a person who has not been incarcerated has. So I do think that some kind of transition into society is necessary, whether it be by way of a halfway house or by way of a third party custodian, which is something that was utilized at the Department of Justice. And I'm sure you're aware of what that is. But for the other senators who may not be aware of that, it is a situation where the individual is released into the custody of a family member. They still have the restrictions that they would have in a halfway house, but rather than a parole officer doing the reporting, it would be the relative with whom the individual is staying. So I think that that should be an option as well.

2:51:35 Very well, Mr. Chair, I have one more question. I know my time hasn't been called. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and Attorney Woods, in regards to, as I look at your resume, you're kind of like um all over the place right you you you constantly move i wanted to know what will be your level of commitment to ensure that you will um be able to spend some time on the parole board and do what will be required in terms of um you know making sure that you attend meeting timely make sure you're available to properly review those candidates that may be considered um you know how how committed are you uh to to be able to ensure that that occurs well senator francis unlike chicago and new york and georgia and any other place that i may have missed that's listed on my resume um st thomas st thomas is my hometown the virgin islands The Virgin Islands is my home. I was born and raised here. I came back to the Virgin Islands because I wanted to be here, surrounded by my family. So, as far as commitment goes, I wouldn't say that that is an issue, as I am here to stay. I am making the preparations to become licensed here in the Virgin Islands so that I can continue working in the capacity of an attorney um the bar taking taking the bar is a very very stressful thing to do it is not something that i would sign up for if i didn't have an intention of remaining here in the virgin islands so i think i've um pretty much set myself up to remain here for a very long time so my commitment to the vi board of parole is not something that should cause any worry for you oh very well thank you thank you very much on your responses thank you very much mr chair for the time and opportunity

2:53:42 thank you very much senator francis senator johnson you are now recognized for your four minutes good afternoon good afternoon again to the viewing and listening audience good afternoon to my colleagues uh attorney woods um have you ever had a case that you prosecute and at some point you felt that that person was innocent i have not again i've only been at the department of justice for a little over two years, so I can imagine if I had been there for a longer term, perhaps I may have had a case where I felt that way, but for the most part, I have not had a case where I felt or I was going forward with the case and I felt like as if the person was innocent. There was a situation, however, where I was prosecuting a case and I strongly believed that the person was in fact guilty, but then I had received some scientific evidence that exonerated that individual, so I ended up dismissing the case, which of course, you know, is the right thing to do and i think those types of decisions are very easy to make when you are concerned about justice when your primary concern is justice and not just about winning the case and making a name for yourself do you believe that there are innocent people in

2:55:28 prison well i know for a fact that there are innocent people in prison and i know this because of the work that i've done with the innocence project in new york i'm not sure if you are familiar with that project but that project they take on cases very much um very much yes um yes so i i the reason why i'm asking you this question um i i walk into prison for some time and i i have a this feeling about prosecutors and and being on this parole board to to give a chance to people and I believe in second chance strongly after working some 20 odd years I've had the opportunity of seeing people that I spoke to spoke to relatives spoke to other folks that there are a lot of innocent people in prison and to the beginning when I first got there I never wanted to believe that never wanted to accept it however what would you consider to be the most important factor when deciding whether to grant parole I think the most important factor I think there there are there are many important factors but what I would say is the most important factor is that individuals ability to re-offend, because the worst thing you could do is put in all this effort into evaluating this individual's application for parole, and you listen to the victim's impact statement, which is a statement that oftentimes goes against their release, and you put all those things on the back burner and you go ahead and release this person and then they go out into society and re-offend so although there's nothing that can be done to ensure that the individual will will not re-offend i think it is very important to really examine and evaluate the entire picture you know the the beginning of their criminal history the types of crimes that

2:57:46 they were convicted of in the past, if they have any past convictions, just to really make sure and to be well with yourself that you're making the right decision to release someone that is going to be a productive member in society and not re-offend. How much consideration should be given to the statement of the victim or the victim family in terms of a percentage how much consideration you know when they come to the parole board although that person is there the victim do have a say the victim submit documents sometimes they come and testify so how much weight do you give that that victim i think considering if you're You're going to give the pause in that opportunity.

2:58:36 I think that the victim statement should hold some weight. Obviously, their life or their lives, if it's more than one victim, were affected significantly by the actions of the parolee. So I think that the victim statement should always be given some

level of consideration. But then I think that you as a parole board member have to be able to distinguish whether or not, you know, this person is coming forth with this statement because they were really affected by this incident, they're still really affected by this incident, or do they not want this person to come out just because they don't want them to come out? I can imagine that that would be the situation with many victims and many victims' families. You know, despite how much an individual may have appeared to have been rehabilitated, they still don't want that person to come out. So there's always going to be that. So while I think that the statements should always be given some level of consideration, I certainly don't think that those statements should be the deciding factor.

- 2:59:55 Mr. Chair, if I may, I just got one question. Yes, you may proceed. Are there any circumstances under which you might find it necessary to recuse or disqualify yourself from a parole? Yes. And a situation, for example, would be if it is a family member of mine that is up for parole. I would certainly want to recuse myself from a situation like that. What about a client that you might have prosecuted? An individual that I may have prosecuted, although I feel like I would still be able to hold an objective head, I still think that the appropriate thing to do would be to recuse myself.
- 3:00:43 Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much. Senator Johnson, Ms. Woods, or Tony Woods, you know, it really warms my heart when I see young, homegrown talent who have done things the right way, pursued their education, and made the decision to come back home to serve. So that is always a very positive thing for me, and it just makes me feel good. You share something in common with one of my sons in that you are both graduates of Duquesne University. He actually graduated in 2020. So that's a positive thing. As a prosecutor, do you ever interact? Is there an opportunity to interact with the parole board?
- 3:01:46 No. I've never had an opportunity to interact with the Parole Board. While I was working at the Department of Justice, my interest to serve on the Parole Board began during my time there, and I knew that while I was working there, I would not be able to serve on the board. And I do believe that the law, the law in the Virgin Islands Code actually precludes anyone in that type of position from serving on the board. I'm sure I may have been able to communicate with some board members, but I have not had the opportunity to do so while I was a prosecutor. Okay. How will your appointment to the parole board make this a better board, in your opinion?
- 3:02:41 In my opinion, I think that my appointment to the board would make the board a better board because while I am not certain as to the credentials or the background of the other board members, I do believe that I bring a set of skills and knowledge as a result of my background that would possibly make them open to some changes that I have in mind. Perhaps because of my background, they may have a little more confidence in some of the changes that I would like to recommend. I know that I would like to work on getting a website put together in preparation for this hearing. I tried to look up some things online and it appears as though there's not a website for the Virgin Islands Board of Parole that is separate and independent from the Bureau of Corrections. Perhaps I'm wrong, but I was unable to find that website. So that is certainly something that I would like to get started. Another thing that I would like to do is just ensure that the parole board members receive the social training and any updated training that exists for parole board members that relate to any updates or changes in the criminal law system or the criminal justice system just to ensure that members are kept abreast of what's going on and how these evaluation processes can be enhanced. Okay, what do you anticipate being possibly your greatest challenge on this board? I know you're not on the board yet,
- 3:04:34 but what do you anticipate being your greatest challenge? My greatest challenge that I can anticipate right now is the fact that I may know some of the individuals that are coming up for parole because maybe I have prosecuted them in the past. I can imagine that that would be a challenge because of the conflict of interest that it creates. So as of now, that is the only challenge that I can think of.
- 3:05:04 Okay. My final question. In terms of your career path, your educational path, what would you have done differently? You know, if you had an opportunity to just go back in time, what would you have done differently? I would have gone to law school right out of my graduate program. And the reason I say that is because I graduated with my master's degree in 2007. So if I had gone to law school right after that, law school is three years if you go full time. So I would have graduated in 2010, which means that I would have had about 11 years of experience right now as an attorney, which would have been wonderful for me because a lot of obstacles that I face in my career now is the fact that I believe that I can do a position that requires 10 years of experience when in fact I only have a little over four.
- 3:06:16 so time certainly works against me in that regard because I'm not as experienced as I would like to be so if I could do something different I would have definitely started law school sooner thank you very much for your candor thank you very much for your decision to serve in this very important capacity. Point of inquiry, Senator Francis. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to go back to Attorney Woods and to ask her about two strengths that she believes that she brings to the table, as well as two weaknesses. If she could mention her strengths and weaknesses, I'll appreciate it. I'm sorry, Senator Francis. Did you mean like overall strengths and weaknesses or just strengths and weaknesses as it relates

to my position on the parole board?

- 3:07:14 Just generally, your strengths and weaknesses, what are you good at? And certainly, what are you challenged or not so good at? Okay. I would say two strengths that I have are, first, I am very, very analytical. I think things out very thoroughly from beginning to end, and that has led me to become very successful in my career, I think, my ability to be very analytical. And another strength, and I think being analytical is also a strength that I would be bringing to the parole board because that is required, in my opinion, of someone who has to evaluate all of these applications that come before them. Another strength I would say that I have is the fact that I am very, very competitive, and I consider that to be a strength because it leads me to be very, very prepared, overprepared, if you will, for things that I do and things that I involve myself with because I always have this desire to want to be the best at everything that I do. Now, with respect to weaknesses, I would say that my competitiveness can oftentimes be a weakness as well, because sometimes I focus so much on winning and not wanting to lose that I actually forget to focus on the lesson that I can learn from what it is I'm doing or I'm trying to accomplish.
- 3:09:04 So that is something that I am working on right now. And the second weakness I would say that I have is I oftentimes try to do everything on my own. I don't like to ask for help very much unless it's absolutely necessary. And I consider that to be a weakness because no one is perfect. Everyone needs help, and that is someone, something, excuse me, that I'm also working on right now. Thank you very much. We've exhausted colleagues, we've exhausted our questions of Attorney Woods.
- 3:09:54 Do I hear a motion at this time? Senator Payne, you are recognized for your motion. Thank you, Mr. President, Mr. Chair. I move that the nomination of Ms. Sherry Woods Esquire to the VI Parole Board be favorably voted on by this committee and forward it to the full body for further consideration. I so move. Second.
- 3:10:26 Properly moved by Senator Payne, seconded by Senator Joseph, roll call on the nomination of Cherise Woods to the Virgin Islands Parole Board. Senator Norvell E. Francis Jr. Senator Francis Jr. Nay. Senator Kenneth L. Giddens. Senator Kenneth L. Giddens, absent. Senator Franklin D. Johnson? No.
- 3:10:57 Senator Franklin D. Johnson, nay. Senator Carla Joseph? Senator Carla Joseph? Yes, I said yes. Senator Carla Joseph, yay. Thank you. Senator Steven Payne, senior? Senior? Yes. Senator Payne, senior, yay. Senator Milton Potter? Yes.
- 3:11:23 Senator Milton Potter, yay. Senator Genevieve Whitaker. Senator Whitaker, absent. Please record Senator Gittin's vote as yes. Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, four yays, two nays, one absent.
- 3:11:51 Thank you very much. Colleagues, the nomination of Attorney Sharice Woods to the Virgin Islands Parole Board has been favorably considered by the Committee on Rules and Judiciary and will be forwarded to the full body for further consideration. Congratulations, Attorney Woods. I'm going to give you 30 seconds to just wrap up. I'll give you a closing thought. yes thank you very much um senator potter and before i begin congratulations on the graduation of your son that is a very big accomplishment um i'd like to thank you again for the opportunity to come before you and the committee on rules and judiciary um i am very excited to have been given this opportunity to serve on the parole board it is my my goal and my objective to do the very best that i can and i look forward to functioning in that role thank you very much thank you very much for your willingness to serve and you are officially released from this hearing thank you very much attorney woods thank you have a great day all right you too madam clerk can you please read the agenda for the final block number five number four the committee on rules and judiciary will consider the nomination for the vi board of architects engineers land surveyors the nominee is stephen samuel Thank you very much, Mr. Samuel, can you hear us loud and clear?
- 3:13:42 Yes, yes I do. Okay, we're hearing you clearly also. As is custom, I'm going to ask you to please raise your right hand. Yes. Okay, do you swear or affirm that the testimony you're about to give and your responses to all questions posed will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? Yes, I do.
- 3:14:12 Thank you very much. Mr. Samuel, thank you for your willingness to serve, first of all. You may proceed with your testimony at this time. I'd like to say good afternoon to the Honorable Senator Milton Potter, the chairman of the the Committee of Rules and Judiciary. Also, good afternoon to the Honorable Senator Gittins, the Vice Chair of the Rules Committee, all the other senators of the 34th Legislature of the Virgin Islands in attendance listening. And of course, thank you and good afternoon to those viewing and listening audience also. At this time, I really would like to also thank Honorable Governor O'Brien for my consideration for this nomination to the Board of Architects, Engineers, and Landsaverers. I'd like to briefly introduce myself. My name is Stephen Samuel.
- 3:15:08 I'm a true native son. My parents are also from here, the island of St. Croix. They had humble beginnings, but they were in no way small-minded. They raised me to be disciplined, to be hardworking, and as a result of that today i'm a professional licensed engineer registered here in the virgin islands for the past 10 years i graduated in 2002 from the saint

croix educational complex while i was enrolled in the saint croix educational complex i also attended the saint croix career and technical education center most most of us know it as the vocational school and I was in the architectural and drafting program there. Mr. Larry Francis was my teacher and a mentor and today still a mentor today. After I graduated from high school, I attended the University of the Virgin Islands in St. Thomas, where I was able to be a part of the 3-2 engineering program. It was a wonderful time. I was able to complete all my math and science requirements and I was allowed to move on to the other university that took me on, which was the Columbia University in New York. And in 2007, I graduated from there from the full foundation of School of Engineering with a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering and a concentration in Structural Engineering. Once I finished college and I returned home, I immediately began working at the department of planning and natural resources under the direction of maureen burke ventura at hotutelage there i was a territorial engineer i was responsible for reviewing plans looking at the structural integrity of commercial buildings capital projects

3:17:00 looking at those plans approving of those plans doing inspections we we spent a lot of time i spent a lot of time doing that. But I then changed my career path from the regulatory side to more of the design and engineering side of my field. And I worked at the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority as part of the engineering team there. And I was a part of many different projects. We had different tasks, project engineering, design engineering, project management, construction management and I was involved in a variety of projects from installation of electrical lines to water lines to construction of buildings. We had an extensive group there and I was proud of my time there. In about 2013, I decided to once again make an adjustment and move over to the private sector by owning my own company uh lumas engineering group and from 2013 to now we've been completing projects successfully my client list ranges from uh fifa to uh vi housing authority to the virginized water part power authority to federal government and uh we're proud to say that we are locally owned, one of the few locally owned companies that has bonding.

3:18:25 So we worked hard, and that's where we're at. I have to say that why I think I'm a good candidate, because I love being here in St. Croix. I love the Virgin Islands, and I understand how important it is to have qualified engineers in our community. It helps the growth of the community, the preservation of our community it improves our infrastructure and during my time at dpnr i was able to really see the regulatory side the codes but then i was also to see i was able to see um from my time in wapa and my time as a private in a private sector the other side of that and i i would love to be able to be on this board and be able to give my input and my recommendations and give as much suggestions as I can to help and improve what we're trying to accomplish here with the engineers, architects, and land surveys. Thank you. This concludes my testimony and I look forward to answering your questions. Thank you very much for your testimony, Mr. Samuel. We will proceed, colleagues with our four-minute round beginning with our large senator senator Stephen Payne thank you thank you for the time mr. chair um mr. Samuel good day sir how are you good a good day i'm doing well thank you senator okay good good let me ask you what have you done to prepare yourself to serve on this board have you reached out to other board members oh that's a good question um i first thing i did was i asked for the statues uh what's my requirements here on the board and i had a good um opportunity to look over them read through them uh senator milton potter his his office did it especially uh speaking with uh duane colwood in that office the chief researcher who did a wonderful job in explaining to me and and giving me that information um i i didn't reach out to anybody on the board uh currently i know that there's a few individuals that were nominated but i don't know who uh was uh confirmed as yet but i look forward to being able to talk to them i do know one of the nominees uh and um we i look forward to speaking to him

3:20:58 thanks you for thank you for your response so what do you consider as your as an individual your strengths or your weaknesses oh well my strength i i love to work i i love to work hard i love to learn and um because of that i i'm happy to say that it's unfortunately also one my weaknesses because i dive so hard into work i don't allow myself to be balanced and sometimes it could have a difficult or adverse effect with my relationship so my wife wouldn't be too happy with how hard i work sometimes or my daughter but that is a it's a passion once i'm passionate about something i want to see it through i want to see it work and the vision i have in my mind is exactly what i want to see in reality and it takes discipline and sometimes sacrifices to make that happen so i would say that that's uh both one of my strengths but then also uh one of my weaknesses uh thanks for that response um i'm sure you can walk on that and that balance because you know your family should actually be your number one priority wifey happy you know you have a happy household um how you work with groups of people do you consider yourself to be a team player or you consider you prefer to fly solo oh no no i love i love to be a team player actually i recognized that more when i went to wapa because at that point i was surrounded by engineers and i absolutely love hearing their ideas bouncing things off of them um seeing things from their standpoint when i was with with my peers then that that was one of the best best times as an engineer so i i'm a great team player i actually used to play sports when i was in high school and in college in the university of brazil so i love being on a team

- 3:22:57 good answer good answer so let me ask you are you doing any are you doing anything personally to mentor young people to go into the field of engineering yes i am i am i haven't found a way to actually have a organization or a structured way but there's many young ones individuals that i speak to and i encourage them when it comes to the field of engineering because i i received that mentorship too sometimes i didn't know which way i would go but when my strengths were recognized in math and science i was you know influenced to go towards engineering and i do the same and i also like to mentor engineers that came back to the island i i received a text not too long ago from my engineer that told me he passed his p and he thanked me for encouraging him to to take the exam so those things make you feel good but i would love to do something more organized so you know i could mentor more and more individuals Okay, and as a board member, what would be your number one priority that you, or your number one concern that you would like to address or see addressed after you become nominated?
- 3:24:11 Well, one of the things that I'd like to address is our continuing education requirements. Currently, we don't have any. I think it would be so important for us to include the continuing education, but also be specific to our location, not just having a broad view of structural engineering or civil engineering, whatever your discipline is, but having a better understanding of the needs engineering-wise for the Virgin Islands.
- 3:24:43 All right. Thank you very much. Your responses, Mr. President, Mr. Chair, thank you very much for the time. Thank you very much, Senator Payne. Senator Carla Joseph, you are now recognized for your four minutes. Thank you kindly, Mr. Chairman, for the time, and I want to say my commendation to Mr. Samuel for taking this opportunity to place on the record his point of view relative to being nominated to the Virgin Islands Board of Architects, Engineers, and Land Surveyors from our big sister island, St. Croix, and also to commend him for taking this leap into the realm of regulator. That's specifically what you are going to be and to be able to look at bringing additional persons to become licensed as architects, engineers and land surveyors. I wanted to ask you because I've looked through your resume a bit, have you had any opportunity, I know you spoke about mentoring, have you had any opportunity to also teach in any type of structured setting any of the theoretical components that you have learned in the field of engineering no no I have not had to have an opportunity to teach in a like you said structure setting or a classroom setting it's something I have thought about I haven't pursued it much but it is something that's kind of in the back of my mind.
- 3:26:38 Okay, thank you. Now, I noted that you had spent some time at the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, and you know, one of the major issues that we're having, especially in the big island of St. Croix, is the environmental impacts and studying the potential adverse environmental impacts that have occurred from the oil refinery. I don't want you to get into any details about that, but tell me your assessment based on your record. You've been doing over some years some environmental assessment reports and you're very familiar with putting those together, are you not?
- 3:27:27 Yes, EARs, SWIPs, or stormwater pollution prevention plans. Yeah, we are familiar with, I am familiar with putting those together. So in saying that, what are some of the hot items you would like to see put in place? Should you be nominated to this board? It may hot items in terms of the environmental problems that we might see here or issues or just? Yes. Yes.
- 3:28:02 Well, in terms of what's there to your heart, what are those hot items? Because you have seen a lot and you have seen a lot, especially living in the Big Island, which is half industrial, half agricultural, half tourism. So looking at it holistically, tell us what some of the hot items you would like to see put in place, especially when you're trying to maintain a balance. That's what engineers try to do strategically. Tell us what you would see in your role as hot items that you can push forward to help our people?
- 3:28:47 Great question. I think first, education, nothing in depth and too technical, but I think sometimes there's such a big gap between the technical principle, engineering principles, but then the, let's say the common knowledge or general knowledge, there's such a large gap there. I think that it'd be good for us, so for me and myself to implement a way where that educational gap could be closed, which would allow individuals to better understand kind of the situations or the things that's happening and even the solutions that could be implemented. I think as when I was at DPNR, that was a big thing.
- 3:29:31 Individuals didn't understand the consequences of certain decisions. Okay, my time has expired. Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. I have concluded all of my questions for this nominee. Thank you kindly. Thank you, Senator Joseph. Thank you very much, Senator Joseph. We'll now proceed with Senator Franklin Johnson. You may proceed with your four minutes, sir. Good afternoon, Mr. Samuel. How are you doing today? Good afternoon, I'm doing well today, Senator Johnson.
- 3:30:07 I'm glad that question brought a little smile out to you because you've been there looking a little tight, man. Relax, man. Relax yourself, man. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. You're cutting today. You're cutting. You know, I must say, I'm going to give the governor a little kudos here today. And I don't know when too often I've done that with him. But he has surely

been picking some young Virgin Islanders and sending them forward. Thank you kindly, Governor, for doing that. I really appreciate young talent, young Virgin Islanders. you guys really make me feel proud when i listen to your background listen to your experience and knowledge and it gives me hope that that that there's a crew coming behind us to take this place over and and take charge so i i i salute you for that um what part of synchro are you from yeah yeah well that's where my family from okay okay sorry say that again maravian church no no no not the maravian church okay i thought i've seen you around there before so i was just trying to place you but um it's good it's good seeing you and um i really appreciate you offering yourself up for service. A lot of times you hear people say that the legislature is hard and folks don't want to go and sit in front of us. And I must say, for my time being here, it's a total different thing. We have been welcoming. And at the end of the day, we vote up, we vote down. But so far, I must say my colleagues have been straight to the point.

- 3:31:48 It hasn't been a personal, gruesome, hard time. And I encourage other folks to put their name up come to these different boards that we need to fill how would you rate your decision-making and problem-solving ability oh that's a good question I I think I would I would rate it if we're doing a scale a 1 out of 10 out I'll be in 8 or 9 category I love to solve problems that's first and foremost I like to look outside the box in trying to figure out well what's the best solution that would satisfy the needs that we have to have. Mathematically, I love it. I could stay in front of numbers all day and feel comfortable and feel at home versus public speaking, I guess. But I appreciate that question because we have a lot of problems that we need to solve on the board some are you know mathematical in a sense some are not is just procedural and even then looking at things outside the box couldn't really really help us streamline certain things that we that we see that's issues what is the hardest decision you ever had to make as an engineer well you know it was hard initially i'll tell you what it was but then it was very easy graduating from colombia university you're given so many offers um it's unbelievable how much engineering firms try to lure you with big packages signing bonuses and um i was at a time struggling with should i come back home
- 3:33:44 or should i stay in the tri-state area and after making a chart of the things that are important to me and st croix won and though it was a tough decision at the time because i had to turn down offers at a young age that i thought would set me up for the future i don't regret that decision you know that was probably the best move that you know i want to say thank you for that decision that you have made because and i get emotional hearing you say that because time after time you hear everybody won the big box and and and and we we need them to come back home we need you folks to come back home to to make sure that you you you know place yourself here and start building this country to where it can be built and without without you all it's not gonna be so i i i really appreciate your candidness and and that solid decision to make the choice to come back home to make your home a better place you if i go vote the 10 times with you you got my vote brother all right have a wonderful thank you senator johnson thank you thank you very much senator Johnson senator Francis you are now recognized for your four minutes thank you very much mr. chair and thank you nominee mr. Samwell for your willingness to serve in this very very important board and more importantly that you're volunteering your services free of charge yes I'll tell you that I I had an opportunity to read your resume last night, and I've also had an opportunity to see you around the island for many years, because you're no stranger to this community. You're out there.
- 3:35:43 And it just filled me with pride as I read your resume, but even your testimony. Native son, you worked under the stewardship of Larry Francis. You graduated from the CTEC as a valedictorian. You were awarded the Department of Education Validatorian Scholarship, the Jovenza Validatorian Scholarship, the Virgin Islands Water and Power Engineering Scholarship. You were also nominated to attend the 2002 UVI Summer Science in Richmond. There have been nothing but progress for you all these years. And I thank you for not just embracing and accepting that, but rather to come home and be willing to serve here.
- 3:36:27 So thank you for that. I believe that serving on this board will be the tip of the iceberg for you, and I don't want you to get discouraged because we don't have a perfect system. Let me be the first to tell you that. We don't have a perfect system, but what we do have is an opportunity. We have a great opportunity to shape this territory into the future. We have a great opportunity with billions of dollars that'll be available as we continue to rebuild our schools, our hospitals, and rebuild this community. And you could be a part of that. So don't be discouraged. I want you to continue to embrace that opportunity and really put your best foot forward because this community needs individuals like you. All right? So let's talk about some of your strengths and I could probably say them for you, you know, just reading your resume, but let's talk a little bit about some of your strengths and weaknesses because obviously i i um i don't want you to be discouraged as you undertake this role and serving on this board what are some of your strengths um so one of my strengths is the ability to solve problems to look for solutions considering things outside of the box looking at things from a different angle i think that came from being a part of one the regulatory side then being with the engineering from a government agency standpoint then the private sector side i'm able to see things from a broader perspective because i've been in pretty much each position as an engineer and i think that that really poses a good strength because i'm able to counter some

suggestions with what might happen or what could

- 3:38:27 happen where you know where some engineers on the board may not have been able to have a experience in so i think that's a strength as far as a weakness i would say is i mentioned a little do before is striking that balance. Love working hard, but also love working hard. Love playing hard in terms of being with my family. I think that's sometimes one of my biggest weaknesses. Once I'm focused, it's like a laser vision and nobody's stopping it. If the goal isn't to work hard then um i sometimes um uh get upset in terms of annoyed like but that's that's what i would say is a weakness of mine oh very well and um you you're in my opinion joining a board of elite individuals that again has a lot of um professional skills when you talk about damian cartwright Jeffrey Baschelti, you know, some of those other individuals that will be serving on this board that will be critical in deciding and shaping the future of the Virgin Islands. So again, thank you for your willingness to serve. I'm looking forward to great things from you. And I don't know if my colleague had mentioned about making sure that we continue to at least embrace that mentorship and bring up somebody else. Don't pull up the ladder.
- 3:40:01 I mean, make sure you're able to train up someone else has been done for you under the stewardship of Mr. Larry Francis and others, you know, make sure that you're able to bring up some. I have a young son that will be going off to a mechanical engineering school in the next couple of months as well. And, you know, we're looking forward to bringing those individuals back to the Virgin Islands and be able to, again, shape the future of the Virgin Islands. Thank you very much, and you can look forward to a positive vote from me. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Senator Francis.
- 3:40:42 Thank you very much, Senator Francis. Senator Gittins, you are recognized for your four minutes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just ran back in here because I'm multitasking, but two things that jumped out. Accomplishments. Passing the National Council of Examiners for Engineering and Surveying. Engineering exam to receive his PE license. And then look at the statement of why I am a good candidate.
- 3:41:24 I have a love and dedication for the Virgin Islands. I understand the importance of having qualified engineers in the community for growth and preservation. During my time at DPNR I became very familiar with the code reviews reviews and understand the need to adapt or modify codes to reflect the specific engineering needs of the virgin islands yes mr stephen samuel yes i will be in touch with you and if not i ask you to call my office there's a a sidebar discussion that i'd like to discuss with you regarding a bill but i just want you to know that you have my support thank you very much i listened to your responses and whatnot of the choices you've made and because this is home i truly appreciate that and embrace any virgin islander that is going to think that way thank you very much and i look forward to supporting your nomination thank you mr chair thank you senator giddens thank you very much senator giddens point of information senator francis mr chair we're trying to remember all those nominees that we had gone through recently and actually send the names on to the governor for nomination on this on this particular board we also had raymond burton again another um virgin islander a young virgin islander that i'm expecting that all of these guys gonna team up and really make things
- 3:43:09 happen uh for for these virgin islands young promising individual very well educated and very well determined in moving this territory forward so i know that team will be remarkable um in the years to come well we didn't all rock and cheer right these guys are the ones that will make things happen for us thank you definitely definitely senator francis i think we have a very strong array of young vibrant talented virgin islanders who've recently been approved to this very very important board at this very very important time in our existence with so many projects and so many things happening in our territory so i definitely it's a heartwarming thing it's one of the favorite things about being in this job having an opportunity to a point and dialogue with young talented Virgin Islanders who have done things the right way and that is the vibe that we experience right now you know having you here mr. Samuel we really appreciate your decision to serve I really believe that service is a noble calling of the highest order you know so it is really you're setting an example for younger Virgin Islanders to follow did you graduate from the 3-2 program at UVI I noticed on your resume you have your hair at UVI and then Columbia I know that that's a one of the schools that we have this relationship with yes so no I didn't graduate from the uvi part of the tree 2 program i successfully did all the requirements uh which was all the math requirements but when i went away to columb i left a year early um which was i did the tree 2 program in two years in uvi and that one year i went to national student exchange to rutgers university and i was able to pick up from there my engineering and then i went to to columbia
- 3:45:12 so i i never did the uvi graduation part of it i would like to look into what else i need to do because i did everything i was supposed to so but i never got the um my degree from there okay i'm sure i'm sure dr ha will be proud to um you know to have you as one of the graduates from the university so you need to look into that for sure what would you say what would you attribute your success to what would be the what's the key to your success particularly in the field of engineering i would say support um like from support from my my mom my dad my sisters my wife even my my daughter um i think that's been the key for me without without them i really wouldn't be here so i am just so happy that

they guided me and directed me and even when i didn't want to they were there when i would complain about physics classes they would listen then they'll tell me, you could do it, Steven. So without them, there's no me, I could tell you for sure.

3:46:38 Absolutely. A support system is definitely key. Would you advocate for the establishment of an engineering program at UVI? most definitely most definitely i had first the math program at uvi prepared me so well for rutgers for colombia i i being you know you're coming from a small island you feel nervous uh you you know to be honest rutgers university is the same population as st croix 50,000 kids. So you feel like, you know, you're not adequate or maybe, you know, you don't know.

3:47:19 But UBI prepared me so well for those universities and those are renowned universities that I could only imagine what they would do with an engineering program. They have already established themselves as one of the top nursing programs. So and then not only that, but people really do love the the Virgin Islands. A lot of my schoolmates that I went to school with in Colombia wanted to come back here to work, wanted to come here to work. So having an engineering school would definitely be a good thing.

3:48:01 Okay. My final question to you, and this is going to be one of those easy votes, but My final question to you is how will your appointment to this position make this board a better board? It's a good question. Thank you for that one Senator Potter. I've worked already along with Burton Auta. We call him Auta but Raymond Burton. I've worked with him in WAPA and we had a great time together. We were able to bounce ideas off of each other. We were able to kind of fill each other's weaknesses with their strengths and vice versa.

3:48:48 I've heard the testimonies that they've had and I am in line with the things that they would like to see for the board. And there's some ideas that I have that I'm sure they'd appreciate hearing too. So I think we work well together and we've always been a committed group as engineers. We have a big engineering chat on WhatsApp. So we look forward to this opportunity that we could actually have this service or provide this service to the community. And we know that we'll do our best to improve it. improve it and if we are failing in any way we look forward to hearing you guys tell us about it so that way we could step up. Well thank you very much Mr.

3:49:41 Samuel for all that you do. Colleagues we've exhausted all of the questions for Mr. Samuel. Motion. Senator Francis you're recognized for your motion. Thank you very much. Mr. Chair, Mr. Chair and colleagues, I move that the governor's nominee, Mr. Stephen Samuel, to serve on the Virgin Islands Board of Architects, Engineers, and Land Surveyors be favorably approved by this Committee of Rules and Judiciary and sent on to the full body for further consideration. I so move. Second. Properly moved by Senator Francis, seconded by Senator Johnson.

3:50:22 Roll call on the nomination of Stephen Samuel to the Board of Architects, Engineers, and Land Surveyors. Senator Norville Francis Jr. Yay. Senator Kenneth L. Gittins. Senator Kenneth L. Gittins, yay. Senator Franklin D. Johnson. Johnson. Senator Johnson, yay. Senator Karla Joseph, yes. Senator Karla Joseph, yay. Senator Steven Payne, senior. Payne, senior. Yes.

3:50:55 Senator Payne, senior, yay. Senator Milton Potter. Yes. Senator Potter, yay. Senator Genevieve Whitaker. Senator Whitaker, absent. Mr. Chairman, six yeas, one absent. Thank you very much, colleagues. The nomination of Mr. Steven Samuel to the board, to the to the virgin islands board of architects engineers and land surveyors has been favorably considered by the committee on rules and judiciary and will be forwarded to the full body for further consideration congratulations mr samuel i'm going to give you 30 seconds to just give you a closing remarks all right thank you again everyone for considering me for this nomination i really appreciate your kind words words, your thoughtful words, I would like to thank my family for the support. Thank you.

3:51:54 Thank you a lot. We understand fully. Thank you very much, sir. Thank you very much. You're officially released from this session. Awesome. Point of personal privilege, Senator Payne. Thank you, thank you, thank you, Mr. Chair, thank you for the time. I just want the listening and viewing audience to remind you all that I'm May 25th, please tune in to Legit TV, the number one television station in the Caribbean, soon to be the world. We'll be having a hearing with the Committee on Homeland Security, Public Safety and Justice, where we'll have VITEMA, the National Guard, Human Services and VIPD giving testimony relative to hurricane preparedness. And we're just a few days away from the beginning of our hurricane season, so please, please, please tune in on Tuesday, May 25th on Legit TV to our committee hearing.

3:53:07 Thank you very much for the time, Mr. Chair. You had a wonderful hearing today. Thank you very much, sir. Colleagues, we've exhausted the items on the agenda for today. I want to thank you for your presence and thank you for your support. We should thank all the testifiers for the willingness to serve, and a special thanks to our awesome Central Staff employees. Once again, I want to invite all the youngsters in the Virgin Islands between the ages of 11 and 18 to

consider enrolling in our virtual financial literacy boot camp. will be forthcoming on our website, www.senatormiltonpatter.com, as well as throughout local media. It's really a powerful opportunity to expose your children to the world of finance and to take the mystery out of it.

3:54:06 Our goal, ultimately, is to develop a cadre, to create a cadre of Virgin Islands millionaires. Again, thank you all for all that you do. The Committee on Rules and Judiciary is hereby adjourned. Thank you.

People named in this transcript

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

28x **Senator Novelle Francis**

heard in this transcript as: Francis, Francis Jr, Francis Jr., Norvell E. Francis Jr, Norville E. Francis Jr, Norville E. Francis Jr.

25x **Senator Carla Joseph**

the surname alone also matches: Clifford Joseph; Karla J. Joseph

heard in this transcript as: Joseph

21x **Senator Steven D. Payne Sr.**

heard in this transcript as: Payne, Payne Sr., Stephen D. Payne, Stephen Payne, Stephen Payne Sr, Stephen Payne Sr.

19x **Senator Kenneth L. Gittens**

heard in this transcript as: Giddens, Gittens, Gittin's, Gittins, Kenneth Giddens, Kenneth L. Giddens

18x **Senator Milton E. Potter**

heard in this transcript as: Milton Potter, Potter

17x **Senator Franklin D. Johnson**

heard in this transcript as: Franklin Johnson, Johnson

11x **Senator Genevieve R. Whitaker**

heard in this transcript as: Genevieve Whitaker, Whitaker

5x **Senator Karla J. Joseph**

the surname alone also matches: Carla Joseph; Clifford Joseph

heard in this transcript as: Karla Joseph

2x **Governor Albert Bryan Jr**

heard in this transcript as: Albert Bryan