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Senate Approves Judge And Conservationist, Lt. Gov. Plans Mass Property Reappraisal

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A marathon day at the Senate saw legislators approve renaming a highway for former Gov. Kenneth Mapp, approve a new judge and conservation specialist, approve laws aiding victims of sex crimes, add penalties for lying to the Legislature, and myriad other bills. Also, the Lt. Governor's Office plans a mass Virgin Islands property reappraisal. (Photos by Alvin Burke JR., Mario Fonseca, Jamal Potter, Dian Cruz and Barry Leerdam, Legislature of the Virgin Islands)

The Senate approved Magistrate Ernest E. Morris Jr. to the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands Monday, as well as Harith Wickrema to the Virgin Islands Conservation District, St. John.

Both men nominated by Gov. Albert Bryan Jr. had been approved by the Senate's [Committee on Rules and Judiciary](#) just four days earlier.

Morris had extensive on-the-job legal training despite less than five years as a magistrate, while Wickrema is also president of Island Green Living Association, a non-profit organization dedicated to expanding sustainability and food security in the territory and beyond.

Earlier in the day, the Lt. Governor's Office asked the Committee on Budget, Finance, and Appropriations to approve \$7,187,246 in spending for fiscal year 2025 — \$283,815 less than 2024. The reduction in requested funding came with a caveat, however. The office is planning a mass reappraisal of land across the territory that will require \$10 million in funding over five years, said Monica Williams Carbon, chief of staff for Lt. Gov. Tregenza Roach.

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The Lt. Governor's Office collected \$28,986,021 in property taxes so far from October 2023 to June 24, 2024. Williams Carbon estimated the final number would be \$61,208,904 by the end of the fiscal year at the end of September. In 2025, she estimated that number would climb to \$64,093,250.

In a marathon session that stretched late into the night, the Legislature approved acts rezoning an area of Sub Base on St. Thomas from commercial to public, rezoning part of Estate Adrian, Cruz Bay Quarter on St. John from low-density residential to medium-density residential, and parts of Estate Contant and Enighed on St. John from medium-density residential to business-secondary/neighborhood.

The Legislature approved naming part of St. Croix's Route 75 after former Gov. Kenneth Mapp and awarding Mapp the Virgin Islands Medal of Honor. The Gov. Kenneth E. Mapp Highway will stretch between the Bassin Triangle intersection and Krausse's Lagune.

The Senate also passed a resolution honoring Willard John for his contributions to the youth and the culture of the Virgin Islands, an act honoring Claire Lorraine Brown Roker for her dedicated service and naming the visitors center at the Ann E. Abramson Marine Facility on St. Croix the Claire L. Roker Visitors Center, a resolution honoring Miguel Santos Jr., better known as DJ Poppy Pops, for his contributions in the field of music and radio broadcasting.

The Senate also voted to add a penalty for lying to the Legislature. Perjury before the Senate had been illegal but had no penalty. Another act required the government of the Virgin Islands to pay for forensic medical exams for all victims of rape or unlawful sexual contact, regardless of whether the victim cooperates with law enforcement or has health insurance.

Another act approved transferred the administration of the Government Insurance Fund from the commissioner of the Virgin Islands Finance Department to the commissioner of the Virgin Islands Labor Department and amended various sections of Title 24 Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 11 to

facilitate better recovery from injury or disease that arises out of and in the course of employment in the Virgin Islands under the Workers' Compensation Administration, and to ensure that workers entitled to Workers' Compensation benefits receive medical, rehabilitation services, and disability compensation without undue delay by merging the benefits and payment components of the Workers' Compensation Insurance Program.

Legislators passed an act ensuring the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority seeks technical assistance from the U.S. Department of Energy, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and relevant federal government agencies to modernize its electrical grid and water system, improve reliability, enhance efficiency, and incorporate advanced technologies. Another act passed provided funding from the School Maintenance and Construction Fund to the Virgin Islands Education Department for the resurfacing, repairs, restoration, construction, and maintenance of the Ivanna Eudora Kean High School track and field facilities.

Another act passed sent \$250,000 from the St. Croix Capital Improvement Fund to the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority for the emergency restoration of electrical services in the Bugby Hole and Spring Garden/Spring Gut areas on the island of St. Croix. The Senate also approved sending \$300,000 to the Virgin Islands Human Services Department to provide emergency funding for the Medicaid and the Meals on Wheels programs — and another approved measure reprogrammed \$100,000 previously appropriated to the Elmo Plaskett Little League West on St. Croix and the Alvin McBean Little League on St. Thomas to the Virgin Islands Little League District – Girls Softball St. Croix and St. Thomas/St. John.

Lastly, the Senate appropriated \$1,434,950 in fiscal year 2024 from the Community Facilities Trust Fund for the pre-construction soft cost funding to prepare the Charlotte Amalie Harbor for dredging and \$1,000,000 from the St. Croix Capital Improvement Fund to the Virgin Islands Public Works Department for emergency grass and bush cutting on the island of St. Croix.