

TESTIMONY OF PRESIDENT DAVID HALL
UNIVERSITY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
28TH LEGISLATURE
OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

HONORABLE LOUIS P. HILL
SENATE PRESIDENT

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ST. THOMAS, U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

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Good morning, Senate President Hill and other members of the 28th Legislature present, other testifiers, members of the Press, persons in the viewing and listening audiences, ladies and gentlemen. My name is David Hall and it is indeed an honor for me to appear before the Committee of the Whole of the 28th Legislature to offer testimony on Bill No. 28-0227, as amended. Here with me today are UVI Board Chair, Mr. Alexander Moorhead and Mr. Vincent Samuel, Vice President for Administration and Finance, who are joining me in the Well.

As the only institution of higher education (IHE) in the Territory, UVI has a tremendous role to play with respect to the advancement of higher education as well as enhancing and empowering the lives of people throughout the Territory. Recognizing this reality, UVI has as its vision statement the following: *The University of the Virgin Islands will be an exceptional U.S. institution of higher education in the Caribbean dedicated to student success, committed to excellence, and pledged to enhancing the social and economic transformation of the U.S. Virgin Islands.* I would ask that you keep UVI's vision in mind as I proceed with my testimony. For, the action you take today regarding Bill No. 28-0227, will be a factor in our ability to make this vision a reality.

As President of the only public, higher education institution in the U.S. Virgin Islands, as I offer testimony on Bill No. 28-0227, I would like to state that my testimony is predicated on the understanding and belief that the severity of the current fiscal situation in which the Virgin Islands Government (VIG) finds itself, as articulated by Governor John de Jongh, Jr. in his correspondence to Senate President Louis Hill, dated, April 23, 2010, is real and there are potential dire consequences to the viable operation of the central government and instrumentalities, unless action is taken on the Bill before you this morning.

I am cognizant that the decision before you is not an easy one. Indeed, there are significant and potentially life changing implications, both short term and long term, no matter how you vote on the Bill before you. As you deliberate and listen to various testifiers today, I ask that you give careful consideration to some possible negative consequences for the University of the Virgin Islands, if we were to experience a reduction in our Operating Budget during the current fiscal year or in Fiscal Year 2011.

First, the University is essential to the economic viability and growth of the Territory. When our educational systems take a step backwards then the social, economic and even political systems will inevitably feel the effects. Therefore, it is critical that this Legislative body does all it can to protect and enhance the educational systems that exist in the Virgin Islands. Unlike states and other territories, there are no private institutions of higher education that can address the higher education needs when the government funded system is being reduced. The University of the Virgin Islands is the sole source of higher educational aspirations for the population you

represent, and it is critical that we serve them in a manner that is consistent with the high standards that will be expected of our students throughout the nation.

It is also important to remember that the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 specifically requires of the Territory, as a condition for receipt of funding, that the University's budget should be maintained at its present level of appropriation. Specifically, § 14002 (a) (2) (A) (ii) states

... to provide, in each of fiscal years 2009, 2010, and 2011, the amount of funds to public institutions of higher education in the State that is needed to restore State support for such institutions (excluding tuition and fees paid by students) to the greater of the fiscal year 2008 or fiscal year 2009 level.

A reduction in this fiscal year and in the next would appear to be inconsistent with the promises and commitments made to Washington. The spirit behind this requirement is based on the fundamental principle that in economic downturns it is critical for our long-term growth that the educational system is not sacrificed.

Second, if we had to absorb a reduction this fiscal year and the next it would require us to halt the forward progress that we have begun this year. The "Quest for Greatness" that I have asked the University and this Territory to embrace would be seriously curtailed. For example, we are in the process of filling numerous faculty and administrative positions that are essential to the maintenance and enhancement of the University. I would have to seriously consider not filling some of those positions in order to address a significant reduction in our budget. There could be a freeze of existing positions and we would have to consider hiring more part time instructors to teach classes. Not only does this hurt the academic standing of the University, compromise our accreditation status with Middle States, but effectuating such action would not easily be achieved.

Third, unlike central governmental entities where raises have been an on-going practice because of collective bargaining agreements, there has not been a system-wide increase for the employees of the University since 2007. A reduction in our Operating Budget would certainly make this a very unlikely possibility in the foreseeable future. The morale of faculty, staff and administrators is critical to the essential operation of a vibrant University. We cannot afford to continue to overlook their needs as the cost of living continues to escalate. I cannot continually ask them to work hard and go the extra mile just on pride and commitment. They need to be rewarded just as other employees are rewarded.

Fourth, the University is desperately in need of additional facilities. A residence hall and an academic building on St. Thomas and an academic building and a multi-purpose facility on St. Croix are pressing priorities. I presented to the UVI Board of

Trustees a plan to achieve these results. The proposed plan was developed on the assumption that our budget will remain constant for the remainder of this fiscal year and the next, and that small increases in our debt capacity would begin in subsequent years. A reduction at this time would bring those plans to a halt. Our fundraising efforts alone cannot fill the gap of the proposed reduction to our Operating Budget, and thus, we would be unable to move forward with the identified pressing facilities needs. We need the support of this body if we are to address some of the basic needs of our students and the community.

Fifth, since I became President, during my meetings with many of you, you have indicated a variety of new programs that you are desirous of having the University offer – to include, Hotel and Resort Management, Engineering, an expanded Nursing program, and many others. Our Alumni body and other important constituencies have also indicated that they often have to go out of the Territory to address their educational needs. If our budget is reduced, then the envisioned new programs that we need to be developing and implementing would be greatly delayed.

Sixth, reductions to our Operating Budget would hamper our retention efforts and our goal to partner with the public school system to improve education in the Territory for all students. We have made significant investments of time over the past seven months in research and deliberations and Task Forces have generated reports and offered recommendations that the faculty will be addressing a week from today. We anticipate implementing at least some of the recommendations in the upcoming Academic Year, but would not be able to do so, were we to experience budget cuts. At a time when we need to increase our students' success and graduation rates, it is not prudent to eliminate programs or positions.

Seventh, a reduction in the Operating Budget of the University would detract from the forward momentum of my presidency by curtailing initiatives; reducing efforts tailored at student retention, particularly that of male students, who currently account for 25% of our student body; limiting our outreach efforts to Alumni and donors, as we try to increase the number and level of donors and gifts; and limit our efforts to put UVI on the map beyond the Territory.

In closing, I would like to urge the Committee of the Whole to take action today on Bill No. 28-0227 that will ensure that we do not lose ground with respect to growing and expanding the human capital of this Territory. Remember that an educated and qualified workforce is essential to the economic recovery of this Territory and the sustained economic viability of the U.S. Virgin Islands. On behalf of the entire University community, I urge you to take the action necessary to ensure that we will achieve our vision, specifically: *The University of the Virgin Islands will be an exceptional U.S. institution of higher education in the Caribbean dedicated to student*

success, committed to excellence, and pledged to enhancing the social and economic transformation of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Bill No. 28-0227 and thank you for your continued support of the University of the Virgin Islands. I stand ready to respond to questions that the Committee may have.