

Inaugural Address
by
Governor Kenneth E. Mapp
United States Virgin Islands
Monday, January 5, 2014
Emancipation Gardens
St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands

(Governor acknowledges list of dignitaries according to protocol)

Good morning. Soon after the end of the 2006 campaign, a gentleman confronted me, wagging his finger and shouted, “Kenneth Mapp, the only way you will ever get into Government House is by invitation.” Well, today, with great pride and humility, I want to thank you, the people of the Virgin Islands, for your huge invitation, inviting me into Government House. Thank you.

As Lieutenant Governor Potter and I take our oaths of office on the grounds of Emancipation Garden, I am reminded of the sacrifices that are forever memorialized in this historic location. The lives of our ancestors, who toiled on the land upon which we now live, work, and play, are consecrated here. This monument to their memory serves as a testament to the unquenchable thirst for human freedom and dignity, as well as our ability and resilience to overcome even the most challenging obstacles.

Those who lived before us and those who taught us to live with integrity and courage—teaching us to have respect for others and to accept personal responsibility—have created a proud people who understand that anything worth having is worth working for. I salute my grandmother, Mrs. Almina Hewitt, who with her husband, managed their farm and raised and provided for thirteen children and then extended her firm hand in raising her 71 grandchildren. Grandma Hewitt prepared us well and challenged us all to do well by doing good.

We are here for a great and noble occasion: the changing of the guard, as provided in our governing charter, the Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands. Today we are carrying on the traditions that have been established over the years. Today we move peacefully from one Administration to the next, from the 7th elected Governor to the 8th.

We do inaugurals because this ceremony celebrates the will of a free people to exercise their vote, to choose through a democratic process who governs. Inauguration means beginning, and today this new Administration is committed to begin a new era on the foundation of “building.” Building for the people of the Virgin Islands, inspiring hope, and constructing a better quality of life. Building to create opportunities for our youth, to provide and care for our senior citizens, and to protect and nurture the well-being of our children. And while we will work hard on doing these things, we will walk in the path that we have been taught, to be respectful, to be compassionate, to be disciplined, to be appreciative, and to be thankful.

Governor John DeJongh, Jr. and Lt. Gov. Gregory Francis, on behalf of our Territory and our people, please accept our thanks and appreciation for your leadership, service and dedication to our beloved Virgin Islands.

Delegate Donna Christian-Christensen, we acknowledge and respect your patriotism and love for the people of the Virgin Islands. Thank you for your more than four decades of service as a physician, community activist, and as our Delegate to Congress.

We also acknowledge our young men and women in uniform for the sacrifices they make each and every day as they protect our freedoms and liberties. Many of our soldiers are serving in faraway places and are in harm's way. Let us continue to keep them in our prayers as they serve our country and make their way back home.

To my fellow Virgin Islanders, I accept the honor you have bestowed upon me to chart a new course for generations to come; a course to restore, to revitalize, to renovate, and to reenergize America's Paradise.

During our campaign, Lt. Governor Potter and I saw firsthand and learned just how difficult life in our Virgin Islands has become. We met single mothers who are struggling to stay employed and feed and clothe their families. We spoke and listened to the business owners who are fighting to keep the lights on and their doors open. We have been in the homes of working couples who have electric bills that have grown larger than one of their paychecks. And because we have all but shut the doors of our senior citizen centers, we have visited with senior citizens in the cafeterias of our hospitals, in the food courts of our shopping centers and malls, and under the trees on our streets.

We mention these difficulties not to cast blame, but to underscore just how difficult the lives of many Virgin Islanders have become because as a community, as a people, and as a government we have lost our way.

For decades we have been counting the money we have and the money we don't have by the hundreds of millions of dollars. So we no longer see that a gallon of milk priced at \$14.00 hurts families. We no longer see that \$.51 pkwh—five times the national average—for electricity kills businesses, puts our people out of work, and forces some families to live by candle light. We have become numb to the violence that pervades our neighborhoods, and we no longer empathize with many folks who simply can no longer make it. Everyday retirees and families decide to move away, because they cannot afford the high cost-of-living in the Virgin Islands.

Every year when our youth graduate from high school, many of them are left with no option, but to leave the territory and not return home because we provide them with little to no opportunities to remain here.

My fellow Virgin Islanders, the consequences of our not so good choices, the unwillingness of many of us to work hard, and the result of many of the poor public policies that we have adopted have come full circle to collect their reward.

And so today, this inauguration—a new beginning—offers us again, new choices. Do we remain on a self-destructive path and continue the behavior that has brought us despair and hopelessness, or do we turn and see the opportunities in the challenges facing us? Are we ready

to work hard, be disciplined, be compassionate to others, and be honest with ourselves and accept our responsibilities so we can truly build a better quality of life for all?

What would you choose? Lt. Governor Potter and I have chosen. We agreed over a year ago that we want to lead a government marked by striving for excellence, not perfection. We committed to each other that we would work hard for the people of this Territory, to be the #1 public servants, and not lords and masters. We agreed to be responsible, honest and transparent.

So today, I share with you that the Virgin Islands has an opportunity for a new beginning. We are at point where we can choose to wave our white flag and give up or face the many challenges ahead and decide that together we will rebuild our beloved Virgin Islands—better and stronger. Osbert and I are inviting everyone to join us in an effort that requires all hands on deck to rebuild our Territory. In order to build a better Virgin Islands, everyone is needed—the private sector, the not-for-profit community, the public sector and everyone in between.

In short, our commitment is simple: we will not betray or trample upon the expectations and hope of you, the people of the Virgin Islands. We see the hope in the eyes of the people of the Virgin Islands, and together we will all work to make the hopes and dreams, of those who call these great Virgin Islands home, a reality. I caution you that this will not happen overnight, but together, keeping focus on a common purpose, it will happen.

Difficult days do lie ahead, but these difficult days are rife with opportunities for a better quality of life. These opportunities will only become a reality if we seize upon them with hope, faith, vision, hard work, and a common purpose to build a better, stronger, and brighter Virgin Islands for all who call these islands home.

In the Gospel according to John, chapter 16, verse 33, Jesus teaches us that “in the world you will have tribulation: but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world”. As Virgin Islanders at this new beginning, we must do just that, be of good cheer. With our faith, our hope, our determination to strive for excellence and our commitment to work hard, we will overcome our tribulations. We will build on the good choices and actions we have taken. We must look towards the future and only learn from the past.

So we are off to building our vision and our promise to you. We’re off to a place to invest in our people, to hire, to create opportunities by growing our economy and providing our youth with the skills and trades to do the jobs and to own and operate the businesses. We’re off to a place to build roads and invest in our infrastructure, and a place where businesses can thrive and prosper because we will work with our business partners fairly, with rules and laws that make sense, that are clear, and that can be relied upon.

To our senior citizens, Osbert and I assure you that we are committed to providing you with open, comfortable and accessible centers where you can have meaningful social interactions with each other and the community.

My friends I want you to know that long ago I set a standard of excellence for myself and today, this is the standard that I am setting for my Administration. To achieve this objective, I will lead first by example.

Like many Virgin Islanders, I come from a very large family, on both sides, families whose roots are deeply planted in the Caribbean—families who exhibited the importance of being involved in a child’s life. For me that included my grandmother, my mother, my many aunts, uncles, cousins and teachers who played a role in shaping the person I have become. They instilled in me a love for others and a love for the U.S. Virgin Islands. They taught me the value of hard work and hence, my passion for public service.

I am a proud product of the public school system so I know firsthand the dedication and sacrifices of our teachers and principals who do so much while earning so little.

My career path, some might say, was an improbable rise to the podium upon which I stand today. I began my public service as a police officer, which gives me a unique insight into our communities.

The more than three decades that I have worked in the public sector have taught me the value of teamwork, coming together as one and the importance of being able to reach across the aisle to get the work done. I pledge to work with the members of our Senate, our new Delegate to Congress, our leaders in the business community, and those who sacrifice and work hard in the not for profit community.

To our former Governors in attendance today, we ask you to be a part of this new beginning; to the members of the Legislature, we need you as part of our foundation; and to the members of our Judiciary who work diligently every day to enforce the rule of law, we also need you as part of our foundation. The wheels of good government work when we all work together.

To our people, we need you. We need your voice and we need your support. We are committed to doing all we can on your behalf, but you too must be a part of this rebuilding. Neither I, nor anyone on my team, will ever ask more of you than we are willing to give. My Administration cannot do this alone; we must stand together or none of us will stand at all.

Thank you for your continued support, and I ask that you keep us in your prayers. God bless the Virgin Islands and God bless the United States of America.