

Virgin Islands Casino Control Commission

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Virgin Islands Casino Control Commission

Fiscal Year 2027

Budget Testimony

Thirty-Sixth Legislature of the Virgin Islands Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance

**Frits E. Lawaetz Legislative Conference Room
St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands**

August 6, 2026

10:00 a.m.

**Carolyn P. Hermon-Percell
Acting Chairman/Chief Executive Officer**

GOOD MORNING, SENATOR NOVELLE E. FRANCIS JR., CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE ON BUDGET, APPROPRIATIONS AND FINANCE, ALL MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE, OTHER MEMBERS OF THE THIRTY-SIXTH LEGISLATURE, LEGISLATIVE STAFF, ALL OTHERS PRESENT IN THE HEARING ROOM, AND THOSE LISTENING OR VIEWING VIA ELECTRONIC MEANS.

THE VIRGIN ISLANDS CASINO CONTROL COMMISSION WELCOMES THIS OPPORTUNITY TO PRESENT OUR FISCAL YEAR 2027 BUDGET REQUEST. FOR THE RECORD, I AM CAROLYN P. HERMON-PERCELL, ACTING CHAIR AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF THE COMMISSION. KELVIN L. VIDALE, ESQ., THE COMMISSION'S LEGAL COUNSEL, IS HERE WITH ME. BEFORE I CONTINUE, I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE A BRIEF STATEMENT FROM COMMISSIONER LUTHER F. RENEE. I QUOTE:

“GOOD MORNING TO ALL. I APOLOGIZE FOR MY ABSENCE FROM THIS HEARING. HOWEVER, I RECENTLY EXPERIENCED SERIOUS MEDICAL ISSUES AND WAS HOSPITALIZED FOR SOME TIME. THANKFULLY, I AM NOW IN RECOVERY AND HAVE RETURNED TO WORK, BUT STILL MUST BE MINDFUL OF MY HEALTH AND WELLNESS. I HOPE THE LEGISLATURE LOOKS FAVORABLY ON THE FISCAL YEAR 2027 BUDGET REQUEST OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS CASINO CONTROL COMMISSION. THANK YOU FOR YOUR UNDERSTANDING.”

WE AT THE COMMISSION ARE GRATEFUL FOR COMMISSIONER RENEE’S PROGRESS AND FOR HIS COMMITMENT TO SERVE THE COMMISSION AND THE PEOPLE OF THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS. WE LOOK FORWARD TO HIS PARTICIPATION IN FUTURE LEGISLATIVE HEARINGS. I KNOW YOU JOIN US IN WISHING COMMISSIONER RENEE CONTINUED STRENGTH, GOOD HEALTH, AND A FULL RECOVERY.

THE STRUCTURE AND MANDATES OF THE COMMISSION ARE CLEARLY ARTICULATED BY THE LAWS OF THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS. PURSUANT TO VIRGIN ISLANDS CODE ANN. TIT. 32, § 404, THE COMMISSION IS AN INDEPENDENT AGENCY OF THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS. THE COMMISSION IS LED BY THREE COMMISSIONERS, ONE OF WHOM IS DESIGNATED BY GUBERNATORIAL NOMINATION AND LEGISLATIVE CONFIRMATION AS THE CHAIRMAN AND SERVES AS THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER. THE COMMISSION IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE LICENSURE AND REGULATION OF CASINOS PURSUANT TO THE VIRGIN ISLANDS CASINO AND RESORT CONTROL ACT OF 1995, AS AMENDED (AS CODIFIED AT 32 V.I.C. § 401 *ET SEQ.*); THE INTERNET GAMING AND GAMBLING PURSUANT TO THE VIRGIN ISLANDS INTERNET GAMING AND INTERNET GAMBLING ACT, AS AMENDED (AS CODIFIED AT 32 V.I.C. § 601 *ET SEQ.*); AND CASINOS AT RACETRACKS (COLLOQUIALLY REFERRED TO AS RACINOS) PURSUANT TO THE VIRGIN ISLANDS HORSE RACING INDUSTRY ASSISTANCE ACTS OF 2011 AND 2016. THESE STATUTES AND ALL RELEVANT AMENDMENTS THERETO ESTABLISH THE BASIS FOR THE ADMINISTRATION, MANAGEMENT AND OPERATION OF THE COMMISSION.

FINANCES

THE COMMISSION HAS FOUR (4) FUNDING SOURCES: (1) THE GENERAL FUND FOR SALARIES OF THE COMMISSIONERS AND STAFF ONLY; (2) THE CASINO CONTROL REVOLVING FUND PURSUANT TO 32 V.I.C. § 514, WHICH IS FUNDED BY ALL LICENSE, REGISTRATION AND PERMIT FEES, FINES, PENALTIES, AND OTHER FEES, ALL SUMS APPROPRIATED THERETO BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS, AND ALL DONATIONS, GIFTS AND BEQUESTS; (3) THE CASINO REVENUE FUND PURSUANT TO 32 V.I.C. § 517, WHICH IS FUNDED BY THE 12% TAX ON GROSS REVENUES FROM THE CASINOS AND CASINO HOTELS OPERATING IN THE CASINO ZONE, CURRENTLY DIVI CARINA BAY CASINO AND RESORT AND VIGL-CRG, COMMONLY REFERRED TO AS CARAVELLE HOTEL AND CASINO; AND (4) THE HORSE RACETRACK CASINO REVENUE FUND PURSUANT TO 32 V.I.C. § 901. THE COMMISSION HAS NOT RECEIVED ANY MONIES FROM THIS ACCOUNT SINCE 2016 WITH THE CLOSURE OF THE CASINO AT THE RANDALL “DOC” JAMES RACETRACK.

AS IT RELATES TO THE GENERAL FUND, THE COMMISSION IS REQUESTING \$1,723,800, FOR SALARIES AND FRINGE COSTS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2027, WHICH IS THE SUM WE REQUESTED AND RECEIVED IN FISCAL YEAR 2026. THIS SUM COVERS SEVENTEEN (17) POSITIONS, FOURTEEN (14) THAT ARE CURRENTLY FILLED AND THREE (3) VACANCIES. THE VACANT POSITIONS INCLUDE THE CHAIRMAN/CEO, THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, AND AN IT SUPPORT SPECIALIST. THE CHART BELOW LISTS THE NAMES OF THE CURRENT COMMISSIONERS AND STAFF.

Name	Position	Proposed Salary	Activity Center	Funding	Retirement	Classification
VACANT	Chairman/CEO	\$125,000	STX	General	Yes	Unclassified
Hermon-Percell, Carolyn P.	Commissioner	\$115,000	STT	General	Yes	Unclassified
Renee, Luther F.	Commissioner	\$115,000	STX	General	Yes	Unclassified
Vidale, Kelvin L.	Legal Counsel	\$110,000	STX	General	Yes	Unclassified
VACANT	Executive Director	\$101,000	STX	General	Yes	Unclassified
Smith, Romesha	Finance and HR Administrator	\$ 70,000	STX	General	Yes	Unclassified
Hurtault, Ruthlin	Licensing & Compliance Officer	\$ 65,000	STX	General	Yes	Unclassified
Davila, Odingo	IT Support Specialist	\$66,000	STX	General	Yes	Unclassified
Vacant	IT Support Specialist	\$64,000	STX	General	Yes	Unclassified
O'Reilly, Daren H.	Archive Technician	\$ 60,000	STX	General	Yes	Unclassified
Henry, Masai	Senior Casino Inspector	\$ 59,000	STX	General	Yes	Unclassified
Blewett, Roberto	Casino Inspector I	\$ 47,000	STX	General	Yes	Unclassified
Daniel, Karissa	Casino Inspector I	\$ 47,000	STX	General	Yes	Unclassified
Erarte, Elsie	Casino Inspector I	\$ 47,000	STX	General	Yes	Unclassified
Knight, Raheem	Casino Inspector I	\$ 47,000	STX	General	Yes	Unclassified
Thompson-Antoine, Brielle	Casino Inspector I	\$47,000	STX	General	Yes	Unclassified
Rodriguez de Garcia, Claridilia	Custodial Worker	\$ 37,000	STX	General	Yes	Unclassified
Total		\$1,222,000				

PURSUANT TO 32 V.I.C. § 514, FROM THE CASINO CONTROL REVOLVING FUND, THE COMMISSION RECEIVES 80% OF THE FUNDS DEPOSITED INTO THIS ACCOUNT AND THE REMAINING 20% PERCENT IS ALLOTTED TO THE DIVISION OF GAMING ENFORCEMENT (“DGE”) AT THE VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE FOR ITS OPERATING EXPENSES RELATIVE TO GAMING INVESTIGATIONS AND ENFORCEMENT. IN THIS FISCAL YEAR 2026, FROM OCTOBER 1, 2025, TO MAY 31, 2026, THE ACCOUNT COLLECTED \$132,590 OF WHICH 80%, OR \$106,072, WAS ALLOCATED TO THE COMMISSION AND 20%, OR \$26,518, TO THE DGE OPERATING ACCOUNT. THE MANDATED SIGNATORIES ON THE DGE ACCOUNT ARE THE COMMISSIONERS AND THE ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS. THE COMMISSION PROVIDES REGULAR FINANCIAL REPORTS TO THE ATTORNEY GENERAL AND THE DGE

DIRECTOR ON THE REVENUES AND EXPENDITURES OF THE CASINO CONTROL REVOLVING FUND.

PURSUANT TO 32 V.I.C. § 517 AND AS OF THE AMENDMENTS ENACTED ON NOVEMBER 10, 2025, FROM THE CASINO REVENUE FUND, THE COMMISSION RECEIVES 23% OF THESE REVENUES FOR ITS OPERATIONS. THE REMAINING 77% IS DISTRIBUTED THROUGHOUT THE GOVERNMENT OF THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS TO SUCH ENTITIES AS THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, DEPARTMENT OF SPORTS, PARKS, & RECREATION, VIRGIN ISLANDS GOVERNMENT HOSPITAL AND HEALTH FACILITIES CORPORATION, AND THE POLICE DEPARTMENT, WITH 1% ALSO BEING ALLOCATED TO THE COMMISSION FOR PROGRAMS TO TREAT AND PREVENT GAMBLING ADDICTION. IN THIS FISCAL YEAR 2026, FROM OCTOBER 1, 2025, TO MAY 31, 2026, THE COMMISSION RECEIVED \$341,361 IN ALLOTMENTS FROM THIS ACCOUNT. THE DISTRIBUTION REPORTS FOR FISCAL YEARS 2019 THROUGH 2025 CAN BE FOUND ON THE COMMISSION'S WEBSITE, CASINOCONTROLCOMMISSION.VI.

SO FAR IN FISCAL YEAR 2026, THE COMMISSION HAS NOT RECEIVED ANY FEDERAL FUNDS. HOWEVER, OVERALL, THE COMMISSION RECEIVED APPROVAL FOR A PROJECT WORKSHEET IN THE TOTAL AMOUNT OF \$123,326.72 (\$120,860 AT THE 98% MATCH RATE) FOR DAMAGES RELATED TO HURRICANE MARIA. THE COMMISSION HAS EXPENDED \$79,999 ON ALL PROJECTS AND HAS RECEIVED, TO DATE, \$78,573, EXCLUSIVE OF THE 2% LOCAL MATCH.

A FINANCIAL OVERVIEW OF THE COMMISSION, BY BANK ACCOUNTS, FOR THE PERIOD OCTOBER 1, 2025, TO MAY 31, 2026, FOLLOWS:

Accounts	Beginning Balance October 1, 2025	Deposits	Disbursements	Ending Balance May 31, 2026
Petty Cash	\$300	\$0	\$0	\$300
Commission Operating Account (BP)	\$886,480	\$632,253	\$471,441	\$1,047,291
Commission Revolving Account (FB)	\$458,154	\$62,692	\$54,282	\$466,564
VI Alliance on Responsible Gaming	\$174,292	\$23,838	\$4,982	\$193,148
Commission\DGE Revolving Account (FB)	\$358,807	\$153,071	\$123,038	\$388,840

THE COMMISSION HAS NO OUTSTANDING PAST DUE INVOICES, AND OUR ONLY OUTSTANDING PAYMENTS ARE FOR CURRENT GOODS AND SERVICES PROCURED OVER THE IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING MONTH.

THE COMMISSION IS LOCATED AT #3005 ESTATE ORANGE GROVE, CHRISTIANSTED, ST. CROIX. THE BUILDING IS LEASED FOR A FIVE-YEAR TERM FROM OCTOBER 5, 2023 TO OCTOBER 4, 2028, FROM THE GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES' RETIREMENT SYSTEM ("GERS") AND CONSISTS OF APPROXIMATELY 4,667 SQUARE FEET OF GROSS LEASABLE AREA. THE COMMISSION REMAINS CURRENT WITH OUR RENTAL OBLIGATIONS TO THE GERS. THE CURRENT ANNUAL RENT PAYMENT IS \$102,674.

ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIONS

ON APRIL 13, 2026, MARVIN L. PICKERING COMPLETED HIS TERM AS CHAIRMAN/CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF THE COMMISSION. THE GOVERNOR’S NOMINEE TO THIS POSITION IS PENDING BEFORE THE LEGISLATURE. ALSO, ON APRIL 8, 2026, THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TENDERED HER RESIGNATION AND THAT POSITION REMAINS VACANT. WITH THE INCREASED FUNDING RECEIVED IN FISCAL YEAR 2026, THE COMMISSION WAS ABLE TO HIRE ANOTHER CASINO INSPECTOR, BRINGING THE TOTAL TO SIX CASINO INSPECTORS. THE COMMISSION NOW PROVIDES COVERAGE AND MONITORING DURING ALL OPERATING HOURS OF THE CASINOS.

AFTER MONTHS OF INTENSIVE RESEARCH, WORKING DRAFTS, AND MEETINGS, WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF GAMING LABORATORIES INTERNATIONAL AND THE INNOVATIVE GROUP AND FOLLOWING A PRODUCTIVE STAKEHOLDERS SUMMIT HELD ON JULY 31, 2025, THE COMMISSION FINALIZED ITS PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE EXISTING INTERNET GAMING AND INTERNET GAMBLING LAW. THE COMMISSION MET WITH MEMBERS OF THE THIRTY-SIXTH LEGISLATURE ON JANUARY 29, 2026, CONCERNING THOSE AMENDMENTS, AS THEY ARE CRITICAL TO THE COMMISSION’S ABILITY TO FULLY IMPLEMENT THIS LEGISLATION ENACTED IN 2001.

ON FEBRUARY 2, 2026, THE COMMISSION SUBMITTED ITS SIXTH ANNUAL REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR AND THE LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS. THE REPORT WAS ISSUED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF 32 VIC § 424 AND CAN BE FOUND

ON THE COMMISSION'S WEBSITE. IN ADDITION, ON THE SAME DATE, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE MANDATES OF 32 V.I.C. § 514(e), THE COMMISSION SUBMITTED THE FOURTH ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE CASINO REVOLVING FUND TO THE LEGISLATURE AND THE COMMISSIONER OF FINANCE. AGAIN, THIS REPORT CAN BE FOUND ON THE COMMISSION'S WEBSITE.

THE COMMISSION RECEIVED AN UNMODIFIED (UNQUALIFIED) FINANCIAL AUDIT REPORT OF ITS FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING SEPTEMBER 30, 2023, FROM BERT SMITH AND COMPANY, NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED INDEPENDENT AUDITORS. IN A PRESS RELEASE DATED JANUARY 12, 2026, THE COMMISSION EXPLAINED THAT AN UNMODIFIED AUDIT OPINION REPRESENTS THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF ASSURANCE REGARDING AN ORGANIZATION'S FINANCIAL STATEMENTS AND SPEAKS TO ITS INTEGRITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY. THIS IS THE THIRD CONSECUTIVE YEAR THAT THE COMMISSION HAS RECEIVED AN UNMODIFIED AUDIT OPINION FROM BERT SMITH, AND THAT FIRM IS CURRENTLY PROCEEDING WITH OUR AUDIT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2024.

ON OCTOBER 28, 2025, THE COMMISSION PROVIDED MANDATORY ETHICS TRAINING TO THE COMMISSIONERS AND THE STAFF. SUCH TRAINING WAS FOLLOWED BY A MANDATORY CONFIDENTIALITY TRAINING SESSION FOR COMMISSIONERS AND STAFF HELD ON NOVEMBER 18, 2025. THE COMMISSION IS COMMITTED TO ENSURING THAT ITS PERSONNEL, AT ALL LEVELS, CONDUCTS ITS BUSINESS WITH THE HIGHEST MORAL AND ETHICAL STANDARDS.

THE COMMISSION CONTINUES TO REVIEW AND MONITOR THE LICENSURE PROCESS FOR CASINO LICENSEES, EMPLOYEES OF THE CASINOS AND CASINO HOTELS, AND FOR GAMING AND NON-GAMING RELATED ENTITIES DOING BUSINESS WITH THE CASINOS. THE DGE CONDUCTS THE BACKGROUND INVESTIGATIONS ON THE APPLICATIONS FOR ALL PERSONS AND ENTITIES SEEKING LICENSURE, INCLUDING NEW AND RENEWAL APPLICATIONS AND REGISTRATIONS FOR GAMING AND NON-GAMING RELATED ENTITIES, CASINO HOTEL EMPLOYEES, CASINO KEY EMPLOYEES AND CASINO SERVICE EMPLOYEES. THE ABILITY OF THE DGE TO TIMELY PROCESS THESE APPLICATIONS HAS BEEN STRENGTHENED BY THE AMENDMENT OF 32 V.I.C. § 517 THAT NOW ALLOCATES 10% OF THE CASINO REVENUE FUND TO THE DGE FOR HIRING OF ADDITIONAL STAFF.

THE TABLE BELOW SHOWS A COMPARISON OF LICENSES ISSUED BY THE COMMISSION FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025 AND FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026 FROM OCTOBER 1, 2025, TO MAY 31, 2026:

<u>Type of License</u>	<u>FY 2025 Number of Licenses</u>	<u>FY 2026 Number of Licenses</u>
Casino Employees	76	35
Casino Key Employees	50	24
Gaming Related Licenses	4	8
Non-Gaming Related Licenses	5	7
Work Permits	296	220
Statements of Compliance	<u>138</u>	<u>80</u>
Total Licenses	569	374

THE COMMISSION ISSUED A TOTAL OF 569 LICENSES IN ALL CATEGORIES AND WORK PERMITS IN FISCAL YEAR 2025. THROUGH MAY 31, 2026, THE COMMISSION HAS ISSUED 374 LICENSES AND WORK PERMITS. ADDITIONALLY, THROUGH MAY 31, 2026, THE COMMISSION HAS ISSUED 67 EXEMPTIONS FROM LICENSURE AND 26 WAIVERS FROM REGISTRATION/LICENSURE VERSUS 116 AND 55, RESPECTIVELY, FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025.

AS OF MAY 31, 2026, THE COMMISSION HAS RECEIVED EIGHT PATRON COMPLAINTS, OF WHICH SIX WERE SENT TO THE DGE FOR INVESTIGATION AND TWO WERE CLOSED INTERNALLY. THE DGE CLOSED ONE INVESTIGATION AND FIVE ARE PENDING. THE COMMISSION RECEIVED SIX REQUESTS FOR PLACEMENT ON THE VOLUNTARY SELF-EXCLUSION LIST (VSE) AND GRANTED TWO PETITIONS FOR REMOVAL FROM THE VSE LIST. ADDITIONALLY, THE COMMISSION RECEIVED FOUR COMPLAINTS FILED BY THE DGE AGAINST CASINO LICENSEES FOR ALLEGED VIOLATIONS OF APPLICABLE LAWS AND RULES. OF THESE, THE COMMISSION HAS DETERMINED THREE CASES WITH ORDERS ISSUED AND ONE CASE REMAINS PENDING.

AS IT PERTAINS TO OUR INITIATIVES FOR THE TREATMENT AND PREVENTION OF PROBLEM GAMBLING, DURING THIS FISCAL YEAR 2026, TWO COUNSELORS AT THE DIVISION OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH ACHIEVED CERTIFICATION AS INTERNATIONAL CERTIFIED GAMBLING COUNSELORS, A RESPECTED, FOUNDATIONAL CREDENTIAL FOR PROFESSIONALS ADDRESSING PROBLEM GAMBLING. UNDER THE TERMS OF THE MEMORANDUM OF

UNDERSTANDING DATED OCTOBER 24, 2024, THE COMMISSION FUNDED THE TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION OF THESE COUNSELORS WHO ARE NOW AVAILABLE LOCALLY AND TERRITORY-WIDE TO PROVIDE GAMBLING DISORDER COUNSELING TO THOSE IN OUR COMMUNITY NEEDING SUCH HELP. TWO OTHER COUNSELORS ARE AWAITING CERTIFICATION TESTING. THE COMMISSION ALSO CONTINUES TO MAINTAIN PLAYWISEVI.ORG, A WEBSITE DEDICATED TO INFORMATION ON RESPONSIBLE GAMING AND PROBLEM GAMBLING.

IN CLOSING, I WOULD BE REMISS IF I DID NOT ACKNOWLEDGE THE MANY EFFORTS OF FORMER CHAIRMAN PICKERING TO ADVANCE THE COMMISSION. DURING THE FIVE PLUS-YEARS OF HIS LEADERSHIP, THE COMMISSION IMPLEMENTED CERTAIN ADMINISTRATIVE, FINANCIAL AND OTHER PROCEDURES THAT HAVE IMPROVED OUR OPERATIONS AND RESTORED TRUST AND CONFIDENCE BY STAKEHOLDERS AND THE PUBLIC IN OUR WORK. HE USED A COLLABORATIVE STYLE THAT ALLOWED ALL VOICES TO BE HEARD BEFORE HE MADE A DECISION, AND I ESPECIALLY APPRECIATED HIS TRANSPARENT MANAGEMENT. HE TOOK GREAT STRIDES TO INVEST IN THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE STAFF. I LEARNED SO MUCH FROM HIM. I ALSO WISH TO THANK COMMISSIONER RENEE, THE EXECUTIVE STAFF AND THE CASINO INSPECTORS FOR THEIR COMMITMENT TO FULFILL THE COMMISSION'S MISSION. ON NOVEMBER 8, 2025, THE COMMISSION CULMINATED ITS CELEBRATION OF OUR 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF REGULATORY EXCELLENCE BY HONORING OUR LEGACY AND SHAPING THE FUTURE. THE COMMISSION HAS DONE

MUCH IN ITS 30 YEARS AND WE AT THE COMMISSION REMAIN FOCUSED ON OUR OBJECTIVES FOR THE CASINO INDUSTRY OF THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS.

MR. CHAIRMAN, THIS CONCLUDES THE TESTIMONY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS CASINO CONTROL COMMISSION RELATIVE TO ITS FISCAL YEAR 2027 BUDGET REQUEST. THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE COMMISSION STAND READY TO RESPOND TO THE BEST OF OUR ABILITY TO YOUR QUESTIONS. THANK YOU.