

**MEMORANDUM OF TESTIMONY OF THE HONORABLE GARRET GRAVES  
BEFORE THE 36<sup>TH</sup> LEGISLATURE OF THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS**

**REGARDING: Request for Extension and Modification of Coastal Zone  
Management Permits, Nos. CZJ-04-14(W) and CZJ-0J-14(L) (SUMMERS' END GROUP  
LLC)**

**FOR AUGUST 28, 2025 MEETING OF THE WHOLE**

My name is Garret Graves. For the past 10 years, from January of 2015 until January of this year, I represented the State of Louisiana in the U.S. House of Representatives. Prior to this, I was appointed by the Governor of Louisiana to lead state efforts to rebuild levees and coastal wetlands destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. This \$15 billion emergency effort had no precedent. The urgency of the mission required us to literally invent solutions to protect our communities, our ecosystem and our way of life. Just a few years later, our state was hit with one of the largest environmental disasters in our nation's history, the Deepwater Horizon oil spill – again, heaping challenges on top of our already-compromised coastal communities.

The Virgin Islands has faced similar challenges.

I have vivid recollections of this in the aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and Maria. I was here in 2017. Our congressional delegation, consisting of Chairman Bill Shuster, then-Senator Kamala Harris, the Resident Commissioner, now Governor of Puerto Rico Jenniffer Gonzalez-Colon and others toured the U.S. Virgin Islands, met with your leaders, took your priorities back to Washington and worked with our colleagues to provide tens of billions of dollars in recovery funding.

I am going to guess that when I just referenced billions of dollars in federal recovery funds, many of you winced. You had conflicting feelings, you thought of a specific person or a story of a neighbor or friend. Billions of dollars is a lot of money and I am certain that announcement of funding was welcomed here, but the maze of bureaucracy and red tape you had to navigate to actually get access to those funds and get them to the people that needed help is an entirely different story. In a word, it was frustrating. You have money in one hand and extraordinary needs in the other – yet, a wall of federal processes that lack common-sense blocks the connection between the two.

This brings me to why we are here today. We are facing a similar challenge that the Government of the Virgin Islands faced in the aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and Maria – and to some degree still faces. In this case, we have a massive investment of \$130 million in one hand, and in the other we have the need for employment opportunities, the need to

expand the tax base, the need to diversify the economy through entrepreneurship, the need to grow the population of the Territory, and the need to restore Coral Bay. The exact same frustration you felt when you were simply trying to help connect funding to people in the aftermath of the hurricanes is what Summer's End has been dealing with now for 11-years. The same federal regulations, policies, and lack of common sense by bureaucrats that do not live here and, likely, never stepped foot on the islands is the red-tape that has caused a snails-pace of progress on this investment opportunity – until now.

Over past few months, we have been working with the alphabet soup of federal agencies and even flagged the Summer's End project to the White House as an example of how broken the federal regulatory process has become. Now, we are seeing attention to this project like never before. Senior officials for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency have been engaged on the Summer's End project for two reasons:

First, to understand how anyone willing to invest well over \$100,000,000 in opportunity for the Virgin Islands can be stuck in regulatory hell for 11-years; and

Second, to ensure the project is getting the attention it deserves to reach an appropriate permit decision.

The supporters of this project have jumped through every hoop, followed every rule, answered every question, and ultimately included mitigation and ecological benefits well beyond the requirements of the federal regulations to address every ecological concern that has been raised. Many of these additional investments or “betterments” are included because Chaliene Summers and Rick Barksdale live here too. They want to ensure that this investment benefits the citizens of the Virgin Islands, the economy, the environment and that it provides opportunity.

After extensive reviews of possible environmental impacts of the Summer's End project could have on things like endangered species, wetlands, aquatic vegetation, marine life and much more, I expect a final decision on the federal permit within the next several weeks. The only way this process can reach its conclusion is if the Government of the Virgin Islands extends the Territorial permit approval of the project.

I want to be clear, this extension is not the result of a problem on the islands, a problem with Summer's End, or any regulatory violation. We are still here, 11-years after an application was filed with the federal agencies, because of the same red-tape that frustrated you in the aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

My mother and father-in-law lived on St. Croix. My mother-in-law worked as a lab-tech in the hospital. My father-in-law was writing a book. They often recounted stories of riding

their moped around St. Croix, the beauty of the landscape and the people – some of the happiest they've met. They maintained lasting friendships with many they lived and worked with.

These are some of the same people that we fought for and tried to help with recovery funding. These are the same people that you tried to help get back on their feet after the hurricanes. I know you would have done anything you could to help connect the recovery funding with the people that needed it, but for the federal bureaucracy. If it was your decision (without going to jail), you would have done the right thing, cut through the red-tape and bureaucracy and simply connected the resources with the people.

In this case, you have an opportunity to do just that. You are being asked to simply re-approve or extend a decision that you've made once before. The only changes are MORE mitigation, MORE investment, and IMPROVED environmental outcomes that have all resulted from engagement with the Territorial government, federal resource agencies and the public. Please don't let the bureaucracy further delay or block a win for the Virgin Islands.

I now make myself available to answer any questions regarding the federal regulatory processes and my oversight of those processes and implementing agencies as a member of Congress.