

**TESTIMONY ON BILL NO. 35-0229 – AN ACT HONORING AND
COMMENDING THE EIGHTH ELECTED GOVERNOR OF THE
VIRGIN ISLANDS, KENNETH EZRA MAPP FOR HIS YEARS OF
SERVICE TO THE PEOPLE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS AND
NAMING ROUTE 75 ON THE ISLAND OF ST. CROIX**

JULY 18, 2024

Good morning, Senator Diane T. Capehart, other senators present, and the listening and viewing audience. My name is Mona L. Barnes and today it is my distinct honor and privilege to speak on behalf of a man that has taught me what true leadership looks like.

The word visionary has been used to describe my mother, Apostle Eleanor Estrada, for her imagination, creativity, inventiveness, innovation, inspiration, intuitiveness, and leadership of the church. However, this word can also apply to former Governor Kenneth E. Mapp. At every stage of his professional career, from policeman to union leader, whether personal security or senator, Executive Director or Governor, Kenneth Mapp has always demonstrated the qualities and skills attributed above to a true visionary and leader.

My first interaction with Governor Kenneth Mapp was from a distance. I have always been a person who craved knowledge and was passionate about learning. During his tenure as a Senator, I saw Governor Mapp on the Senate floor arguing a point. I said to myself this man is really passionate about this thing! He was relentless and would not let up. His knowledge of the subject matter was remarkable. His ability to quote information and statistics at a moment's notice was impressive. His command of the English language and his elegance of speech was unparalleled. He was poised, confident, and unwavering. The spark of admiration was lit.

My next interaction with him was on the campaign trail. In February of 2012, I decided to put my hat in the race for Governor of the U.S. Virgin Islands. Shortly after my decision and announcement, I found out that

Governor Mapp had also indicated his intention to join the race. Immediately I knew that my chance for victory had diminished, but I had no choice but to continue my quest. On the trail, Governor Mapp would always give me advice and encouragement. He probably thought that I was not much of a threat, but I appreciated the opportunity to learn and gained so much knowledge from him during those moments. This was indeed astonishing as we were candidates in the same gubernatorial race. You don't find that with any other candidate, in any political race, for any political position. This gave me another glimpse of the man that is Kenneth Mapp. His care and concern for a fellow political aspirant was truly inspiring.

After Governor Mapp's victory in the general election, I was very excited and pledged my support in the run-off. Although my candidacy was not successful, I was confident that a qualified candidate had won the race and possessed the qualities, skills and abilities needed to lead these islands. I pledged my unwavering commitment. The islands needed a leader with vision for a truly better Virgin Islands. Someone with innovation, who was not afraid to think outside of the box. Under his administration, the Virgin Islands prospered from his innovation and creative thinking. Clearly, the man was a genius.

My life changed when I was asked to become the Director of the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Agency (VITEMA). I now had the opportunity to sit and glean from someone I admired from a distance for years. And learn I did. Governor Mapp exemplified honor, valor, patience when needed, and passion when not. His can-do approach was infectious, and we all came to see his vision of a better Virgin Islands.

My relationship changed again after the two category five storms that hit our Territory in 2017. I began to see the magnitude of being a true leader. When human expectation was beyond reason Governor Mapp stayed calm and steady, never cracking under pressure, but always working to provide the best he could for the residents of this Territory. My first tongue lashing came when he got to St. Thomas and because of my being in the weeds he calmly said to me, "get on my plane when it's leaving today". Fear gripped and I wondered if I would have a job the next day. While on the plane he simply said to me and I quote "I hired you to manage, not to do the work". He said, "if you continue like this, this job will kill you. Go home to your

Mom and spend a few days and rest”. Once again, I had the opportunity to see another side of the man; caring, considerate, compassionate. Needless to say, he called me the next day and said I need you in the office now. Lol

Without question, Governor Mapp looked out for the people of these Virgin Islands. Their care and wellbeing were always foremost in his mind. After the storm he gathered every branch of government that was needed to issue a business license and told the community, “If you own a truck, a backhoe or anything that could carry away trash come to government house and get a business license to work”. Clearly Governor Mapp did things differently. He marched to the beat of his own drum. While you may not have admired his style, you must admire his tenacity and his ability to get things done. I remember to this day businesses that still thank the Mapp Administration for getting them started in entrepreneurship.

Although Governor Mapp is tough and can sometimes be brash, it was always in the best interests of the people. He always said what he meant and meant what he said. During the hurricane briefings, I would always know when something was getting ready to go down. He would never call me Director, instead, he would say Reverend. I remember distinctly one day when he said to me, “if Ernest asks me one more time where I sleep in St. Thomas, I’m going to let him have it”. Those things were trivial to Governor Mapp and detracted from the big picture, which was making a better life for the residents of this Territory. This was his singular focus. After he told me how he would respond I said, “no Governor, you can’t say that”. We know how that went. Lol

I remember traveling with the Governor and him reaching into his wallet and showing me a picture of himself and his brothers at a very young age. What a lesson on life. He explained to me that, from a young age, he knew he would be someone great, but he did not know how. As he showed me the picture, his brothers were sitting on a bench, and he was standing. He said he refused to sit with his brothers because he wanted to stand out and that was what was going to happen. Throughout his life, in whatever role he played, Governor Mapp stood out like a shining star. His illumination was bright, and it was obvious to everyone that his prophetic self-affirmation was indeed true: Kenneth Mapp was going to be somebody. He was destined for

greatness! The one thing I learned from that conversation is never try to blend in but stand out.

Although he showed that hard exterior, I was able to see the soft side of the man in the way he cared for his Mother. Although she could not totally understand the magnitude of who her son had become, she remained the center and most important thing in his life. He always made sure she was comfortable and happy. I remember the day his Mother passed away and he asked me to have the funeral at my church. Without question, I responded, yes. However, while making preparations and seating arrangements, I remember distinctly one of the governor's greatest supporters and I got into an argument concerning the seating of dignitaries and we were called to the Governor's mother's house. After I told the Governor my concern he simply said, you know the protocol and I put you in charge, do what you know. As we laid his Mom to rest, he stood by me and simply said thank you. It wasn't what he said but the way he said it. Once again, another layer to this great man. Now not a Governor, but simply a son who had lost his mother.

As we all know, Governor Mapp loved nice things, but it was not only for himself, but for others as well. I remember sitting next to him at a conference in Guam and he offered me a chocolate. I had never seen this chocolate in my life. I refused the first time; he offered me again and once again I declined. The third time I said no, and he looked at me and said, "no one has ever refused me three times". Although I did not say it openly, in my mind I said, there's always a first.

Governor Mapp recognized my passion for learning and ensured that I was always in the right place at the right time to take advantage of every opportunity to increase my knowledge base. I remember one Sunday I got a call from the Governor, and he said "Director, what are you doing"? I said, "I just got home from church". He said, "Meet me at Blue Water Terrace and bring your buddy" (that was the administrator Stephanie Willams). When we arrived, I was introduced to the men who were negotiating the Limetree deal. Just inviting me into the room to listen and learn or accompanying him when we traveled to meet President Donald Trump are a few of my most treasured memories with the Governor. As he arrived and

I greeted him at the hanger he said, “you see what you would have had to deal with if you were governor”? I gladly told him, “Governor you got this”. As we sat on the aircraft, I remembered him saying, “they wanted me to take you off the manifest and I told them no”. I don’t think he will ever understand just what that meant to me, but it meant a lot. Or when one of the members of my church died and the funeral was the same day as the Vice-President’s visit, he said, “I know how you feel about your ministry, but I need you to be at the briefing”. Once again, his concern for my dual role and my ministry demonstrated his caring and commitment, as well as his leadership style. As God would have it, I was able to attend the briefing, skip the motorcade, and make it to the church in time to do the closing prayer and the service in the cemetery.

Working for Governor Mapp was the toughest school of learning I have ever attended, but it was the best. Governor Mapp was a hard task master and he responded as a parent would, sometimes having to administer tough love, but always tempering it with wit, compassion, and caring. At times what hurts the flesh, feeds the spirit. Knowledge learned will last forever. He was without question or reservation, one of the greatest leaders, mentor, and inspiration that I have ever had the pleasure of working with. I would not exchange the experience for anything and will treasure it always. Clearly, former Governor Kenneth E. Mapp is deserving of this award and distinction. He is truly a Virgin Islands hero.

This concludes my testimony. I am available to answer any questions that you may have.