

TESTIMONY
BY PRESIDENT LAVERNE E. RAGSTER

TO THE FINANCE COMMITTEE OF THE LEGISLATURE
TO PROVIDE AN OPERATING APPROPRIATION FOR FY 2007 FOR
THE UNIVERSITY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY PARK
JULY 24, 2006

Good morning, Honorable Senator Louis Hill, Chairman of the Finance Committee, members of the Committee, and other members of the 26th Legislature.

The University of the Virgin Islands Research and Technology Park, or RTPark for short, appreciates the opportunity to appear before this Committee and to respond to your questions as you consider an appropriation of \$1.5 million for fiscal year 2007 for the continued early stage development of the RTPark.

Please note that this request is separate from the pending appropriations request for operational funding for the University of the Virgin Islands. Although the RTPark is affiliated with UVI, it is a distinct corporation chartered by the Legislature, and governed by a board of directors separate from that of UVI.

The RTPark is an economic development initiative of the University that was chartered in legislation, and founded to leverage and build on the assets of the territory in a way that will create positive economic benefits for the University, our Government, and the general community. The central purpose of the RTPark is to promote technology-driven economic development in the territory, and in so doing help foster a more diversified economy with tangible and sustainable benefits for the people of the Virgin Islands. The RTPark is expected to become financially self-sustaining over time, creating jobs, providing tax revenues and strengthening the academic and financial capabilities of the University.

To date, the RTPark has achieved much since its founding. It has seated a board of directors, established its headquarters on St. Croix in temporary offices on the UVI campus, entered into a ground lease for 10 acres of land on the campus, developed a Master Plan, obtained funding for the construction of its Technology Center, developed a business plan, secured its first strategic partner, recruited an Executive Director, and initiated relationships which we expect will be instrumental in securing tenants, additional sources of funding and revenues, and growing community awareness of and involvement in its mission. Over the past year, it has taken an active role working with Treasury to facilitate solutions for the sourcing of income issue arising out of the American Jobs Creation Act of 2004.

The RTPark is an example of leadership across many disciplines – demonstrating how higher education, the private sector and Government can forge a partnership that will drive economic development, build economic stability and improve the fortunes of the people of the Virgin Islands.

We commend the Legislature for its support of the RTPark. The Legislature recently authorized a grant of \$7 million through the Virgin Islands Public Finance Authority for construction of the RTPark's Technology Center. In addition to the operating funds the RTPark is seeking in this appropriations request, the RTPark is actively pursuing other avenues for funding including federal grants and loans, to provide funding for development of the RTPark's enterprise network infrastructure as well as its community and commercial outreach initiatives. The key objective is to set the stage for private sector participation – and investment – in the RTPark.

Working arm-in-arm with this Committee and the Legislature, we all stand committed to helping shape a brighter economic future for the Territory of the U.S. Virgin Islands. Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for your support and encouragement, and for favorable action of the Finance Committee to provide an appropriation of \$1.5 million for the RTPark for FY2007. We look forward to working with the members of the 26th Legislature and the Governor to enable the territory to rapidly position itself to take advantage of emerging opportunities in the fast changing technology environment, for the benefit of this and every future generation of the people of the Virgin Islands.

Dr. LaVerne Ragster
President
University of the Virgin Islands