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# President Trump Declares Major Disaster for U.S. Virgin Islands, Freeing Up FEMA Support; Bryan Says Declaration Not Expansive Enough

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Ernice Gilbert **April 02, 2020**

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**President Donald Trump** By. WALL STREET JOURNAL

President Donald Trump on Thursday signed a major disaster declaration for the U.S. Virgin Islands, a move that immediately frees up federal support to supplement the territory's efforts in combating the coronavirus pandemic.

According to the White House, the president's action makes Federal funding available to the territory and certain private nonprofit organizations for emergency protective measures, including direct Federal assistance for all islands in the USVI impacted by the virus, also called Covid-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019).

[Last week](#), Governor Albert Bryan told the media that his administration had written to the president seeking approval of a major disaster declaration, and had expected a positive outcome sometime this week.

"The nature of the application focuses on our health crisis, the growing economic crisis and the inevitable government fiscal fallout as a result of this pandemic," Mr. Bryan said.

According to a Government House release late Thursday, the declaration designates federal assistance to be used for emergency aid related to health care efforts of the coronavirus and peripheral issues arising from the pandemic. The federal assistance will be administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and will provide 75 percent federal funding for all islands in the territory.

Mr. Bryan also requested federal aid for persons and households affected by the COVID-19 outbreak, and that request for individual assistance currently is under review by the federal government, Government House said.

"While this is welcome relief and will assist our efforts to contain the spread of the virus, this declaration is not as expansive as we have hoped," Mr. Bryan said. "The measures required to effectively respond to the health crisis have created an economic crisis across the nation and in our territory and we are hoping for additional support for our dislocated workers, small businesses owners, farmers and fishermen."

Among the specified uses for the public assistance that have been approved are:

- Management, control and reduction of immediate threats to public health and safety, such as Emergency Operation Center costs and disinfection of public facilities.
- Emergency medical care, including medical treatment of infected persons in a shelter or temporary medical facility, use of specialized medical equipment and medical supplies
- Medical sheltering
- Purchase and distribution of food, water, ice, medicine and other consumable supplies
- Security and law enforcement
- Movement of supplies and persons
- Communications of general health and safety to the public

The approval comes as the territory continues to reel under financial pressure exacerbated by a pathogen that brought the local economy — still recovering from the hurricanes of 2017 — to a near halt. The USVI's main product, tourism, has been placed in hibernation, non-essential business have closed, and the workforce is dwindling as hundreds seek unemployment benefits. The Department of Labor said this week that 1,000 people had filed unemployment claims in St. Thomas. And though figures were not yet available for St. Croix, the number of job losses are expected to be in the hundreds, if not over 1,000.

In a call with the media on Wednesday, Mr. Bryan said the administration would ask the federal government to forgive \$303 million in Community Disaster Loans provided to the USVI following Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

"We wrote the President and the (U.S.) Treasury to ask them to forgive the \$303 million, which would allow us to borrow again," the governor said. "We would return to Treasury and borrow half (of the \$303 million) in order to be able to conduct business and be able to get WAPA liquid."

FEMA Administrator, Pete Gaynor, and William Vogel, Department of Homeland Security Federal Coordinating Officer for Federal recovery operations in the affected areas, will lead the local effort, according to the White House.

Additional designations may be made at a later date if requested by the territory and warranted by the results of further assessments, the White House said.

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