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Bryan Administration Now Says Stimulus Checks Will Start Going Out Next Month, And it Will Take Until October to Issue Most Payments

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Governor Albert Bryan said last week Monday that the local government had been approved to receive the \$84.7 million from the U.S. Treasury for stimulus check payments to Virgin Islands residents, and that the funds would start going out this week. The news excited residents — over 7,000 of whom have been laid off from their jobs because of the coronavirus — and thousands of others who have seen their finances squeezed as a result of the pandemic.

But while Mr. Bryan is saying one thing, the director of the V.I. Bureau of Internal Revenue, Joel Lee, is saying another.

Speaking on the administration's "Press Box" event on Thursday, which sees the administration interviewing its own officials, Mr. Lee said the checks wouldn't start going out until June, and once the process begins, it would take up to four months to issue most of the payments. This means some residents will have to wait until October to receive their stimulus payment, and even later for others.

[Last week](#), Mr. Bryan said, "We're anticipating by sometime late next week we will be turning out those checks."

Mr. Lee said once the checks start going out in June, B.I.R. would attempt to issue \$5 million every week. That's 17 weeks or 4.25 months to issue the \$84.7 million. If the payments start in June as Mr. Lee says, it would go well into October for the administration to issue most of the stimulus checks to Virgin Islanders. "Give us four months for us to get the bulk of it out and then, you know, if you want to reach out, reach out. But help us help you," Mr. Lee said.

Mr. Lee also shared other pertinent details relative to the releasing of the funds. "What we're going to do is we're going to base [the issuance of payments] on when you filed. Obviously it's not fair that somebody comes in and files yesterday and they get their check faster than someone who filed months ago, on time, according to the guidelines," he said.

The director said the banks were being taken into consideration as well. "We have been working with the banks because remember, banks are involved in this process," Mr. Lee said. "We very well can have thousands of people show up in front of the banks. They have their own virus protocols that they're working with, so what we're going to do we're going to break it up in pieces and I think, based on some discussions, we're targeting around \$5 million a week."

Mr. Lee discouraged residents from calling to ask specifically about timeline of check issuance. "I mean if you know when you filed we're just trying to keep it going. We are trying to process so you can get the check. If we're tied up answering phone calls, checking stuff, that kinds of slows us down, so just be cognizant of that," he said.

The B.I.R. director said the \$84.7 million in stimulus funds represents an unprecedented situation, and he asked Virgin Islanders to be patient. "Remember we're talking... unlike normal situations, this is an eligibility opportunity for everyone who is eligible, so we expect everything is going to double as far as the volume. We're already seeing it, but I presume once money hits the street it's going to increase. But you just have to be patient with us. Give us four months for us to get the bulk out and then, you know, if you want to reach out, reach out. But help us help you."

The administration has fielded some heat on its handling of the timeline of stimulus funds release. A firestorm erupted [two weeks ago](#) on the status of the stimulus payments being provided to Virgin Islanders through the local government. Back then Mr. Bryan, in announcing that the funds could be delayed until June, called on Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett to help hasten the process in Washington. But during an interview with the Consortium, Ms. Plaskett — who stressed that she had done her part — said the administration was slow to submit adequate documentation to Treasury.

The response caused a riot online, with Mr. Bryan being lambasted and lampooned. The administration responded the same day (April 28), stating that it had submitted its recommendation of \$84.7 million to the U.S. Treasury two days earlier (April 26).

Since then, Mr. Bryan said his administration had been waiting on a set of rules from Treasury, which he told the Consortium included who would pay Social Security recipients, who's

accountable for the funds, what reports and controls would be in place, and who pays for veterans on disability.

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