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Bryan Sees Hope in Congress's Next Coronavirus aid Bill; \$8 Million to be Paid out to Social Security Recipients Next Week

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Governor Albert Bryan on Monday expressed optimism that the territory would receive some funding in Congress's next coronavirus aid bill, funding the local government desperately needs, he said.

Speaking during his coronavirus response update, the governor said the local government "has been operating on fumes the last few months, and we are facing an extremely austere budget for Fiscal Year 2021."

He added, "This stimulus package promises to provide the shot in the arm needed to maintain the level of government service we need as we ride out the impacts of the pandemic. It will also

provide the wiggle room we need to pay the financial obligations that we have as a government.”

If the funding is made available, it would help the government stay afloat this year, but Mr. Bryan said next year is expected to be difficult as well. The governor is also hoping that his push to have Congress forgive the territory's \$300 million community disaster loan will be successful.

But the amount states will receive from the latest round of stimulus funding, if any, has not yet been decided. Republicans want no new funding for states, however for Democrats, any bill without funding for the local governments is a nonstarter. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said the Trump administration is aiming for a \$1 trillion price tag and that the focus of the aid would be on “kids and jobs and vaccines.” The administration also sees tax credits as incentives for businesses to rehire people.

Democrats want to see an extension of the \$600 weekly enhanced unemployment payments through January, and another round of stimulus payments for households.

Even so, some Republicans have said the final bill would most likely include some funding for states as it's such a top priority for Democrats. “I do believe there will be something in there,” Sen. John Cornyn of Texas, a member of Senate GOP leadership told reporters, according to the Wall Street Journal, saying that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi had made clear “that’s a red line for her.”

Republicans are already to the point where they would include language in the upcoming bill that would give flexibility to states for federal funding already received. The USVI received \$75 million from the federal government as part of the CARES Act, but the funds couldn't to be used to make payroll, a critical part of the territory's obligation coming in at \$20 million biweekly. Mr. Bryan has used some of the funding for other purposes, including \$15 million given to WAPA which has been used to provide \$250 and \$500 rebates to WAPA's residential and commercial customers respectively.

The governor is also [providing \\$1,000 scholarships](#) to 2020 USVI graduates from CARES Act funding.

Elsewhere locally, the Bureau of Internal Revenue is expected to start making CARES Act stimulus payments to Social Security recipients. The governor said about \$8 million is expected to be distributed next week.

There were four coronavirus-related hospitalizations at the Schneider Regional Medical Center, with at least one on a ventilator as of Monday, according to the governor. One patient was hospitalized at the Juan F. Luis Hospital as of Monday.