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Bryan Administration Ready to Take Drastic Steps to Fight Coronavirus if Necessary, Including Closure of Schools, Cancelation of Big Events. Hospitals Announced as Quarantine Sites.

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A store in Seoul, South Korea being disinfected. By. KIM HONG-JI/REUTERS

Gov. Albert Bryan sat down Monday evening with the V.I. Consortium for a free-wheeling, on-camera interview at Government House on St. Croix. Topics ranged from the territory's response to the deadly coronavirus to the financial status of the Water and Power Authority, the government retirement system and Mr. Bryan's peculiar views on why an admitted fraudster should still do business in the territory, under the right circumstances.

Among other things, the governor reassured residents that the government is prepared to take dramatic steps to protect residents from the coronavirus, also known as COVID19, in the event the virus appears within the territory.

There have been no confirmed or suspected cases in the USVI, Mr. Bryan said. The Caribbean region's first confirmed case of coronavirus has appeared in the Dominican Republic, and one suspected case has been reported in the neighboring British Virgin Islands.

The territory is prepared with areas at the Juan F. Luis and Schneider Regional hospitals that are suitable quarantine sites, Mr. Bryan said. Suitable locations on VI National Guard grounds can be available, also. "And we do have the ability to work with CDC to transport people to Puerto Rico" to be quarantined.

Mr. Bryan reassured the public that the government is prepared for a wide-range of scenarios, including school closing to slow transmission among children and the cancellation of major events. "Certainly I have the power to evoke the executive orders that would create martial law that would stop people from congregating if it got to a point where we believe it was going to be mass-distributed," the governor said. "...We would cancel any large concerts or congregations. We would definitely shutdown schools — we even may have to look at quarantining our government offices. Any place a lot of people come and congregate those measures would have to be taken."

However, Mr. Bryan emphasized that school closings and patient quarantines are not likely to become necessary. "We have one confirmed case in the entire Caribbean."

Mr. Bryan echoed comments from the Trump administration that the threat from coronavirus is extremely low in the United States. Even lower in the V.I., Mr. Bryan said, because of the islands are far less densely populated than China, where the virus is believed to have originated.

Influenza kills 40,000 to 60,000 people annually in the U.S., Mr. Bryan said. As of Monday, there were about 87,000 coronavirus cases and 3,000 deaths worldwide.

Mr. Bryan said most of those who succumbed to coronavirus have been over 85-years-old, raising particularly concern in his mind about the senior citizens. The governor also expressed concern about children, who are more likely to spread the virus through contact at schools.

The Government's Advice to the Public

Wash your hands regularly. Cough or sneeze onto your sleeve, and not your hands. Use a tissue, if possible, and dispose of it in the trash.

If you feel sick and you have traveled to a location where you think you have been exposed to coronavirus, call your doctor.

"Don't go out into the public, don't go to the emergency room," Mr. Bryan said. "Call your physician. Contact the Department of Health. Let them know what your symptoms are so they can assess you and make the necessary precautions to get you the care you need."

A Few Quick Take-Aways from the Gov. Bryan Interview

WAPA: While acknowledging that WAPA remains "in a bad place," Mr. Bryan said the authority has lined up Wall Street financing that would allow it to get long-term, high-interest debts under control. The administration and WAPA spent the entirety of 2019 trying to push an increase in the

consumer base utility rate through the Public Services Commission. The increase would allow the government and WAPA to obtain more favorable financing. The highly unpopular rate hike was approved.

GERS: By the end of his first term, the administration's goal is to have \$1.2 billion in assets available to the Government Employees Retirement System. "If we can't get there, we failed," he said. He quickly clarified. "No me, not as an administration but we, as a people. ... If the GERS goes, the GVI (Government of the Virgin Islands) goes."

Isolara Morningstar Hotel: Gov. Bryan and the Legislature gave the green light to a rezoning request by a developer St. Thomas developer who pleaded guilty to playing a key role in a scheme to rig competitive bids and defraud the territorial government. The developer paid a \$500,000 fine under the Corrupt Influences and Racketeering Act. The rezoning allows the developer, Paul Sabers, to move forward with his plan to turn a storm-damaged guesthouse into a \$13 million "boutique" hotel in Estate Bakkerroe. The governor said just because the developer pleaded guilty to defrauding the taxpayers, he shouldn't be disbarred from participating in potential economic development in the territory.