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USVI Will Be Okay Under Trump Administration, an Optimistic Bryan Says

Governor Albert Bryan Jr., preparing for a trip to Washington, expresses confidence in navigating a Republican-led federal government, focusing on securing Medicaid cap removal, rum cover tax extension, and aligning with Puerto Rico for shared benefits

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Governor Albert Bryan, Jr. By. GOVERNMENT HOUSE

During Monday's press briefing from Government House, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. disclosed that he would soon travel to the mainland to engage in a series of meetings, as the federal government undergoes its transition to a new administration.

“I’ve been fielding a lot of calls and texts lately about many of you worrying about the results of the election and how the Virgin Islands is going to fare with a Republican House, Senate and a Republican [President],” he noted, explaining the purpose of the trip.

The conversations he expects to have with these government officials are “critical, because they ensure that the federal government remains a strong partner for us,” Governor Bryan said. “We need them to transform our territory and improve the quality of life for our Virgin Islanders,” he continued.

A longstanding issue for the territory has been the permanent extension of rum cover over tax remittances, an issue that Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett was initially confident could have been done before the end of 2022. The inability of the 118th Congress to agree on a bipartisan tax bill placed the initiative into indefinite limbo. However now, with one party control over Congress, Governor Bryan is optimistic.

“I think we’re going to be able to get it moved,” he said. “We’re hoping that it’ll move rather quickly, and we can get this attached, as there is no strong opposition.”

Mr. Bryan also indicated that he was also going to be lobbying for the territory’s cap on Medicaid to be lifted. He did not seem to think that anticipated cuts to the program under a Trump administration would adversely affect the territory. Having successfully negotiated a large increase in the amount of federal support for Medicaid – currently 83% up from 56% – the removal of the cap would be “icing on the cake” for the Virgin Islands, the governor said.

The promised elimination of the Department of Education was also not a major concern for Governor Bryan. “Right now we have a lot of education money for the next two years that has been obligated,” he noted – approximately \$100 million.

In general, “I think the Virgin Islands is going to be okay,” Governor Bryan assured, “mainly because we really follow what Puerto Rico gets. And I think the president is going to be very nice to Puerto Rico...partly because of the insult that was leveraged by a comedian who was on his team.” Additionally, the governor noted that his Puerto Rican counterpart, Jenniffer González-Colón, “is a Trumper...who actually came out in defense of the president on the issue” of the comments made.

“We’ve reached out with her to have conversations about what Puerto Rico is going to be asking for, and hoping that we can get in on the coattails of that,” he said. Puerto Rico is also lobbying for the extension of the enhanced rum cover over remittances, and has also been seeking the removal of the cap on Medicaid funding.