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'Must be Another Virgin Islands': Senators Say Bryan's Address Disconnected from Public Reality

Senators express concerns over healthcare, education, and infrastructure, highlighting gaps between the governor's optimistic outlook and the challenges faced by residents.

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Janeke Simon **January 28, 2025**

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Governor Albert Bryan Jr. and Senator Kurt Vialet shake hands at the governor's 7th State of the Territory Address. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

Governor Albert Bryan Jr.'s penultimate State of the Territory Address on Monday drew mixed reviews from legislators commenting immediately following the conclusion of his presentation.

While generally pleased with the governor's optimistic tone and grand plans for the future of the Virgin Islands, some, like Senate President Milton Potter, felt a disconnect. "The governor gave

an eloquent speech, but whether or not it fully aligns with the reality of the average Virgin Islander on the street – that is another story,” he stated.

“I don't think that all is well in the territory,” said Potter. He noted that the governor emphasized that “things are really progressing nicely in the territory.” According to the president of the 36th Legislature, however, “there's some level of incongruence between much of what the governor articulated and the realities of the man and woman on the street.”

Similar sentiments were shared by Senator Kurt Vialet. “What struck me the most is that it doesn't correlate to the reality on the ground,” he said in his assessment of the address. “The reality on the ground at this point in the Virgin Islands is one that is not good... Health care is at the lowest stage on the island of St. Croix. There are so many issues at the Juan Luis Hospital in reference to supplies, personnel, [and] wait time in the emergency room.”

Mr. Vialet, who will chair the Committee on Education and Workforce Development, also expressed caution over Governor Bryan's pronouncements on education. The Government of the Virgin Islands is expected to begin work on several schools with the oversight of the Super Project Management Office. “When you look at that, and then you hear ‘we're building 10 schools by the end of the year’, I really just want them to be able to maintain the present schools.” He wondered what accommodations would be made for students while simultaneous reconstruction projects are occurring. Mr. Vialet also bemoaned the lack of attention to the homeless population and mental health in Mr. Bryan's speech. “Matter of fact, you really didn't hear much about human services,” he lamented.

Senator Ray Fonseca, too, expected more detail on the territory's elderly homes and the persistent boarder issue at the territory's hospitals. “In my area of health, hospitals and human services, I think he touched the surface, but he didn't go into the sufficient detail that I would have liked to hear.”

These experienced lawmakers were not the only ones who had difficulty with this year's address. Freshman senator Hubert Frederick also wanted more. “I was looking to see if what he was saying translated into good for the people. I think it fell a little short,” he admitted. According to Frederick, the State of the Territory Address was an “upbeat speech to talk about his administration's top accomplishments.” He noted that the “regular people” that he deals with “can't relate to that. They can't see how any of that impacts their lives...they're disconnected from that kind of stuff.”

Senator Alma Francis Heyliger shared similar concerns. “There was some type of a disconnect in regards to him elaborating on certain things. He would say ‘There's sewage in the streets, but we're going to fix it.’ What does that mean to the average person?” she wondered. “People just want something to hold on to. They need some type of information.” She suggested providing the public with concrete plans and timelines to hold them over. “For seven years of being in this job, I expect a lot more. I expect a little bit better,” said Francis Heyliger.

Never one to mince words, Senator Franklin Johnson gave a blunt assessment of Governor Bryan's address to the territory: “I honestly believe the governor was talking about a different Virgin Islands, not the same one that I'm seeing.” He referenced failing hospital infrastructure and prolonged wait times, [delays](#) at the Paul E. Joseph Stadium, and [injuries to horses](#) at the Clinton E. Phipps Racetrack as examples of the issues in the “real” Virgin Islands that urgently need to be addressed.

Following Monday's State of the Territory address, the 36th Legislature is expected to convene several meetings to investigate some of the territory's most pressing issues. According to Mr. Vialet, chair of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development, that committee will soon receive an update from the Bureau of School Construction and Maintenance, while the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance will tackle issues surrounding the Paul E. Joseph Stadium Build. Leadership of the Juan F. Luis Hospital are also expected to appear before the Committee on Health, Hospitals, and Human Services in short order.

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