

Image not found or type unknown

U.S. Virgin Islands Recovery Never Hinged on Undocumented Immigrants, Bryan Says

As the federal government tightens immigration laws, Governor Bryan says RebuildVI will draw workers from the U.S. mainland, though he acknowledges rising labor costs as a challenge.

Development / **Published On January 31, 2025 05:11 AM /**

Janeka Simon **January 31, 2025**

Image not found or type unknown



Outside the Jiffy Mart near Basin Triangle in Christiansted, a once-busy spot where immigrants waited for contractors, has seen a sharp decline in activity following the immigration crackdown. **By. V.I. CONSORTIUM**

In his interview with the Consortium earlier this week, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. clarified that his administration's strategy for rebuilding the U.S. Virgin Islands after the devastating storms of 2017 was never to depend on undocumented immigrants.

Addressing the current federal crackdown on illegal immigration, Governor Bryan stated, “Our problem was never to rely on illegal immigration to do our recovery. Our plan was to be able to get workers from the U.S. workforce.”

The governor expressed skepticism about the sustainability of President Trump's immigration policies, particularly the plan to transport illegal immigrants back to their homelands. "I think the President's plans are lofty," he remarked. "They don't have anywhere to put all these people." He highlighted the logistical challenges by noting the current capacity issues in detention facilities: "The jails are full in San Juan, they're full in Florida. They're full in Texas."

This statement contrasts with Mr. Trump's intention to maintain a stringent immigration policy, including expanding the migrant detention facility in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba to full capacity, and using planes to deport undocumented immigrants back to their countries. President Trump has remained steadfast in his commitment to enforcing his immigration policy, which includes plans for more direct deportations rather than the catch-and-release methods previously criticized. Trump's administration has been vocal about not only continuing but intensifying these efforts, aiming to use military resources for immigration enforcement, which would include logistical support like transportation back to migrants' homelands.

Even so, Governor Bryan predicted that due to capacity constraints, the enforcement on undocumented migrants would soon revert to the previous system, where migrants would essentially turn themselves in to immigration authorities, receive a plane ticket to a destination like New York, and be given a court date. “People just turn themselves into immigration...they have a plane ticket to New York, they put them on a plane, and they give them a court date. We're going to return to that,” he said. Meanwhile construction sites across the USVI are shedding workers due to the president's aggressive immigration policy.

Mr. Bryan remained confident that the territory's recovery efforts would not be hindered by the lack of labor from undocumented immigrants. He explained that large project bundles under the RebuildVI initiative would bring in workers from the U.S. mainland who are typically part of the teams assembled for such projects, traveling with the necessary personnel and able to offer attractive wages and per diems to draw workers to the islands.

However, he acknowledged the challenges posed by the booming U.S. economy and the tight labor market, which could drive up construction costs as demand for labor increases. “I didn't say it was gonna be easy,” Governor Bryan noted, “but it's gonna happen.”