

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Governor Bryan Says 'I Feel a Pain in My Heart' at the Thought of Cancelling Carnival. 'It's Almost Like Taking Down Your Flag.'

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Governor Albert Bryan waves Moko Jumbies during the 2019 VI Carnival (St. Thomas Carnival). By. KAREEM ALEXANDER FOR VI CONSORTIUM

Governor Albert Bryan said on talk radio Saturday morning that he feels a "pain" in his heart every time the thought of cancelling the VI Carnival comes to mind. The governor on Friday [refused to announce](#) the cancellation of the event during a press conference, stating instead that it would "most likely" be cancelled, and later demonstrating some frustration when he said, "If you don't want to go to Carnival, you know, you have the

ability not to go. You do not need me to cancel it for you not to go. But we'll definitely be looking at that as things progress."

Mr. Bryan, during the Friday press conference, declared a state of emergency and placed a moratorium on all permits for large gatherings until further notice. Even so, he was unable to outright announce the cancellation of the largest "public gathering" in the territory — VI Carnival — in an effort to battle the virulent disease's spread.

During [an interview](#) on Saturday on the "Just Jamilla" radio show hosted by Jamila Russell, the governor again resisted announcing the cancellation of carnival when pressed by Ms. Russell for a definite answer. Instead, he stated that his action of placing a moratorium on permits for large gatherings had already placed the event on "life support."

The governor also said that discussions were ongoing as to whether to cancel or postpone, or hold some events while foregoing others.

Then, the governor said the idea of cancelling the annual festivity was hard for him. "I just want to say, personally, every time I talk about it, I just feel a pain in my heart about cancelling carnival. I mean carnival has never been, I don't think in history, has been cancelled. I remember rain don't stop the carnival, so for me, it's very nostalgic... It's almost like taking down your flag and saying retreat. That's one thing no matter what we've been through in the Virgin Islands that we have always been able to count on as a symbol of our strength, unity and cultural pride. So it's a very difficult thing for me personally to do, but it seems inevitable at this point."

The governor also suggested that even if he cancels carnival, people would still go out and party. "You know what's going to happen, right? The same thing that's going to happen today. We cancelled the St. Patrick's Day parade but I'm going to bet my bottom dollar that this afternoon the bars are going to be full in Christiansted," he said.

States on the U.S. mainland have been placing ban on large gatherings to prevent the spread of the disease. Mr. Bryan said his administration's next step would include such measures. "I want the public to be assured that.. this is the first step. The next step will be nobody is having anything and we're going to enforce that by law. We're in a state of emergency now; it gives the governor these broad powers," Mr. Bryan said. The governor suggested the number to be no more than 150-250 people, a large amount per capita when compared to actions taking in the U.S. New York, for example, a state of 17.8 million people, have placed a ban of most gatherings of more than 500. The USVI has a population of roughly 110,000.

The governor said his administration's "next level" measures will see enforcement when the coronavirus becomes "a real public health issue."

VI Carnival, the 68th annual affair, is set for April 4th through May 3.