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Carnival Postponed 'Indefinitely', Ban on Gatherings of More Than 50 People Instated, Bryan Announces During Coronavirus Press Briefing

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Ernice Gilbert **March 16, 2020**

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Reveler participates during VI Carnival (St. Thomas Carnival) Adults Parade in 2019. By. KAREEM ALEXANDER FOR VI CONSORTIUM

Governor Albert Bryan was flanked by a broad team of administration officials at the University of the Virgin Islands ACC Room on St. Thomas Monday. There, Mr. Bryan, who had just came from a phone call that included President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence, delivered his most sweeping orders so far to combat the novel coronavirus, the deadly pathogen that causes the Covid-19 disease.

Upon taking the mic, the governor announced that effective immediately, all public schools territory-wide would close — an action Mr. Bryan said was encouraged by Mr. Trump, representing the administration's goal to contain the virus before it spreads, instead of being reactionary and acting after cases have been detected.

The governor also announced the postponement of the VI Carnival "indefinitely," indicating that the administration had no idea when — or if — this year's festivities would be held.

Going further, the governor announced a ban on gatherings of groups or individuals of more than 50 persons, following guidelines provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. He later told the Consortium that if residents were not adhering to the ban, a curfew would be put in place.

The actions represent Mr. Bryan's most drastic moves to contain the virulent coronavirus yet. He revealed that the Department of Health as of Monday was awaiting results of tests conducted on eight individuals, and today sent another nine samples to the CDC for testing. The Dept. of Health has so far received results from four tests, three of which came back negative while one tested positive for the coronavirus. The person who tested positive has been self-quarantining at home and is expected to fully recover, the governor said. The Consortium has learned that the person in self-quarantine is on St. Croix. The Dept. of Health said Friday that this person is a resident with some recent international travel history to one of the five locations with widespread transmission of the disease.

This brings the total number of cases sent for testing so far in the USVI to 21 — three of which have returned negative, one positive, and the remaining 17 outstanding, according to information provided by the governor during the press briefing.

The governor said the economic impact on the territory from the pandemic stands to be painful. Asked about cash-on-hand, he said the territory's liquidity moving forward would be "rigid." Mr. Bryan said an upside is that the government had set aside some \$34 million to pay tax returns, but those funds, it appeared Mr. Bryan was saying, will be used to keep the government afloat.

Dept. of Tourism Commissioner Joseph Boschulte said hotel occupancy had declined to a mere 30 percent from its recent high. And there's virtually no airlift to the USVI, instead, people are flying out. Cruise ships have placed a 30-day halt on operations, which further damages the territory's tourism industry.

It is hard to say if the Dept. of Health will be able to keep up with demand for testings and possible cases as numbers start to rise. The department will not only have to address suspected and confirmed cases, but also the people that those suspected or confirmed to be sick had come in contact with. As of Monday, D.O.H. had still not received all the requisite tools to perform tests.

"We are hoping for the best but are prepared for the worst," Mr. Bryan said, referring to suspected cases — called "Persons Under Investigation" — that have been sent to be tested.