

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Seven Years Tested by Crisis and Defined as Progress: Governor Bryan Delivers His Final State of the Territory Address

In his final SOTA, Governor Bryan reviewed 7 years of crisis management, economic growth, debt reduction, pension stabilization, recovery execution, corruption cases, infrastructure investment, and the challenges he says will face the next administration.

Government / **Published On January 27, 2026 05:59 AM /**

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Governor Bryan delivers his final State of the Territory Address on Monday night. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE.

The United States Virgin Islands is currently anchored in progress, declared Governor Albert Bryan Jr. during his final State of the Territory Address, delivered before the Legislature on Monday evening.

In a two-hour-long speech, Governor Bryan outlined his administration's recent wins, legacy projects, plans for the future, and concerted efforts to remedy the "distressed" Virgin Islands that he inherited 7 years ago. He used the speech as an opportunity to "take stock, speak with candor, and update" residents "on the journey we have been on..."

The governor first outlined the accomplishments and challenges of the 12 months since his [last State of the Territory Address](#), a year marked by "adversity" that "tested our resolve and the plans which we have laid." Mr. Bryan recalled that programs that were "carefully aligned with federal rules" needed to be advocated for once more, and new trade policies and tariff pressures brought by the change in federal administration "created a real sense of uncertainty."

The threat of steep [maritime fees on Chinese-built vessels](#), the prolonged federal government shutdown, and the potential loss of \$34 million in Educational Stabilization grants were major external challenges that the local government was forced to navigate.

Governor Bryan also highlighted issues which threatened to derail plans to stabilize the energy grid, and crippling ransomware attacks on the the territory's hospitals.

He also lamented on what he deemed "the most painful test of this term," the conviction of three members of his cabinet: [Calvert White](#), [Jenifer O'Neal](#) and [Ray Martinez](#). Against the backdrop of their arrests and prosecutions, the governor promised that his administration remains "committed to integrity and does not tolerate leaders who abuse their position of power." Governor Bryan has recommitted to "stamping out corruption, wherever it appears, and to protecting the trust you have placed in me and my cabinet."

Notwithstanding a past year marred by the aforementioned adversities, Governor Bryan maintained an upbeat tone. He declared that 2025 was a "banner year for the Virgin Islands." "Not only did our economy remain strong, but we made good on promises to the people of the Virgin Islands," he said.

In the past year, the government paid \$47 million in tax refunds. To date, the Bryan Roach Administration has "paid half a billion dollars in tax refunds," the governor said, touting it as "progress." He celebrated the return of "over \$1 million of unclaimed property and bank accounts to our residents" and commended the Office of the Lieutenant Governor for modernizing its services.

The governor was pleased to announce that his administration has paid out "over \$21 million in retroactive payments." This brings the total amount paid by his administration to \$66 million, a hefty sum in its own right but a mere dent in the overall figure owed, estimated a decade ago to be [above \\$300 million](#). In his 2022 SoTA, Governor Bryan had promised a "plan that will pay the government's outstanding debt in retroactive wages to former and present employees dating back to 1990." A new governor will ultimately have to decide whether that plan will be feasible to allow the government to continue paying down the considerable sum still owing.

Nevertheless, Governor Bryan continued on to highlight “one of the most significant accomplishments in decades” — the securing of an [increase in the rum cover over rate](#) to \$13.25 per proof gallon. It is a permanent arrangement and expected to provide security for retirees who are part of the Government Employees' Retirement System “for the next 30 years.”

Governor Bryan then turned his attention to the territory's recovery efforts, a feature of every recent SoTA. More than \$11.8 billion in federal recovery funds are currently under contract, he noted. The figure translates to “more than 36 complex projects” including schools, health care facilities, roads, and public utilities. Project bundles managed by the Office of Disaster Recovery are at various stages, including those put out to bid and those already outlined in active contracts. The Juan F. Luis Hospital project, for example, will soon be awarded to a contractor, he promised.

Of note, the prudent replacement of the territory's two main power plants is currently in the bid selection process. ODR and the Rebuild USVI initiative have now “shifted the recovery from planning to execution.” While Mr. Bryan highlighted the historically low unemployment rate as a positive for Virgin Islanders, he did not address the dire need for skilled labor to advance the very recovery projects the territory depends on for forward progress.

Nonetheless, the governor remained optimistic about the territory's energy prospects. A solar project in the pipeline for St. Thomas is expected to help alleviate the island's power woes, he noted.

Paragraphs on public infrastructure dotted Governor Bryan's 48-page speech. He spoke happily of reconstructed bridges, paved roads, the new ferries and funding for upcoming projects like Veterans Drive phase two and the Crown Bay expansion.

His remarks also covered housing, including the authorization of [\\$2 million more](#) for the VI Slice Program. The governor spoke highly of the EnVIsion Tomorrow program, about which there have been [several complaints](#), from contractors and homeowners alike. The expansion and creation of new housing units, and the reopening of once shuttered public spaces like the Vincent Mason Pool, were included in his commentary.

Excluded from his remarks, however, was any mention of the Paul E. Joseph Stadium. In the 2025 SoTA, Governor Bryan was excited about seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. Its completion was a [Christmas promise](#) that remains unfulfilled.

While Governor Bryan declared that the territory is anchored in progress, he noted that the theme is “not a finish line.” He outlined several initiatives that his administration hopes to commence and/or complete in his final year.

Among them is the reopening of the Charlotte Kimelman Cancer Center, and merging the Territorial Hospital Board to “establish a single territorial hospital system.” Governor Bryan also plans to work with governors in the other insular territories in a “coordinated effort to bring telehealth to our people.”

In 2026, the government will close the John H. Woodson Junior High “for good,” while students will “walk into the new, state-of-the-art Arthur A. Richards Pre K-8 School.”

More road projects are slated for 2026, including in Bolongo and Bovoni. The Waste Management Authority is expected to construct new convenience centers and legislation is being prepared to invest in air curtain incinerators for green waste.

Governor Bryan has, however, warned the public that “we must begin paying our fair share for solid waste disposal.”

At his final SoTA, the governor leveraged the opportunity to reflect on his two consecutive terms as the territory’s chief executive. He recalled inheriting a government “so strained that even meeting payroll was in doubt.” There were “no cash reserves,” and the Government Employees’ Retirement System was in a [precarious position](#), contemplating the prospect of impending insolvency.

“Long after we leave office, history will judge [this rescue of GERS](#) as one of the most consequential achievements for our people,” the governor declared.

“When we took office, a stop sign was rare to encounter. Not even the streetlights were working,” he said.

Governor Bryan recalled, as well, the overall debt of \$2.2 billion when he took office in 2019. Overall debt has now been reduced “by 25% to \$1.6 billion today.”

He spoke at length of his administration’s management of the COVID-19 pandemic and the creative tactics used to keep the territory afloat.

“Our economy is stronger today than ever before, and certainly stronger than the one I inherited,” Governor Bryan announced. He touted a “conservative, responsible approach that has driven measurable growth.” According to Mr. Bryan, the territory’s GDP has “grown from \$3.9 billion in 2018 to an estimated \$5 billion today.”

The governor also spoke of bumper tourism figures, procurement transparency, modernization of the Bureau of Motor Vehicles, reducing the Medicaid match, tackling drainage problems in troublesome areas like Gallows Bay, upgrades to the airports, consolidation of the Government Insurance Fund and Workers’ Compensation, rebuilt Head Start facilities, and successful union negotiations.

Mr. Bryan also gave credit to his predecessors while painting his own tenure as a continuation of an incessant stride to betterment. “I did not start the journey and I will not finish it,” he stated.

Ultimately, Governor Bryan’s final SoTA was his opportunity to remind the people of the Virgin Islands of what his administration had been able to accomplish.

“When the next generation measures this era, it will see a government that finished the work that others talked about for 40 years,” he said.

The territory’s leader offered a word of advice for the duo that will follow the Bryan-Roach administration. “In the next four years, the Virgin Islands will face different challenges than those we inherited in 2019,” he warned. Inflation and the rising cost of living will inevitably be challenges to be tackled, he noted.

With recovery projects set to advance well past his tenure, Mr. Bryan advised that “rebuilding is only part of the assignment...Maintenance is not glamorous, but it is the difference between progress that holds and progress that slips.”

Governor Bryan anticipates that the next administration will “inherit real pressure.” “The road ahead is demanding. It is also worthy,” he added.

There will be no shortage of opportunities for Governor Albert Bryan Jr. to address his constituents in the next 12 months. Still, his final SoTA wrapped up with a message that “the next chapter of self-governance in these Virgin Islands will require citizens who vote with purpose, citizens who hold leaders accountable without tearing down the whole house, and citizens who show up to build.”

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