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## “Almost Done” Bryan Defends Paul E. Joseph Stadium Timeline Amid On-Air Clash

During a WTJX radio exchange, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. said the long-delayed stadium project is nearing completion but focused largely on past decisions, cost risks, FEMA requirements, and legislative disputes rather than a clear timeline.

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Public frustration over the long-delayed reconstruction of the Paul E. Joseph Stadium resurfaced this week during a radio panel discussion, prompting Governor Albert Bryan Jr. to again defend his administration’s handling of the project while facing pushback from current and former lawmakers.

Appearing Wednesday morning on WTJX's Analyze This with former Senator Neville James, Governor Bryan responded to James' description of the stadium project as an "embarrassment," saying the work is now "almost done" and warning that restarting the procurement process would significantly increase costs.

"We are working with a contractor weekly to get this done," Bryan said. "We can't afford to send this out again. If we send this out to bid again, it's another \$15 [or] \$20 million."

The governor acknowledged that the project's timeline has stretched far beyond what was originally anticipated. "This project should have been done a long time," he said.

While insisting he was not assigning blame, Bryan pointed to decisions made under prior administrations as contributing factors. "I'm not blaming. I'm just stating the facts," he said, before noting that "Governor Mapp stopped the project that was groundbreaking in 2014 by John de Jongh." He said subsequent changes during the Mapp administration required significant structural work, recalling that modifications "put \$12 million in piles so that the stadium could stand up."

Bryan also cited regulatory hurdles tied to the stadium's location in a floodplain, which required additional approvals from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Those requirements, he said, further compounded delays.

"Then the delays and the delays," Bryan said. "We go into the Senate, we owed, like, \$2 million in delayed claims on this project alone." He accused the Legislature of resisting payment of those claims, saying lawmakers were "getting in its feelings," and singled out Senator Franklin Johnson by name.

"The same Frankie Johnson being in the Mapp administration and Government House when they turn it around, [is] the same Frankie Johnson that's cussing now, because we don't want to pay the delayed claims," Bryan said.

Johnson quickly responded during the broadcast, sending a text message to the program's host that was read on air. "It's eight years he's in office. Stop blaming Mapp," the message stated.

Despite the back-and-forth, Bryan said his focus remains on completing the project before the end of his term. "Hey, it's painful," he said. "Three governors, one stadium."

The exchange underscored how the Paul E. Joseph Stadium continues to serve as both a symbol of delayed infrastructure development and a point of ongoing political contention, even as the administration maintains that the long-running project is nearing completion.