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'Stop the Divisiveness', 'Act Like Adults' Bryan Says When Asked Why Most Stimulus Checks in First Batch Went to St. Thomas

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Ernice Gilbert **May 15, 2020**

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Governor Albert Bryan during his Thursday coronavirus press briefing said questions on why over 2,200 of 2,595 of the first batch of coronavirus stimulus checks went to St. Thomas, while the remaining were split between St. Croix and St. John, was dividing the territory, stating that such stories "drive a wedge" between Virgin Islanders.

During a Wednesday Committee of the Whole hearing, V.I. Bureau of Internal Revenue Director, Joel Lee, and Dept. of Finance Commissioner, Kirk Callwood, [both told lawmakers](#) that most of the checks in the first batch went to St. Thomas. They were responding to a question from Senator Kurt Viallet, who called for parity moving forward for check distribution.

Mr. Callwood said, "It's overwhelmingly St. Thomas." Mr. Lee said, "I think the first one was mostly St. Thomas," referring to the stimulus payments.

The problem "needs to be rectified this week with the \$6.1 million, so when the \$6.1 million is coming out, the bulk can't go St. Thomas again [because] we have individuals in St. Croix that also need these stimulus monies," Mr. Vialet said. "We need some parity and whatever mechanism you need to put in place to have parity, please put it in place." The senator said information provided to the Senate was that over 2,200 of the checks went to St. Thomas and less than 300 checks went to St. Croix.

On Thursday, however, Governor Bryan suggested that such matters should not be discussed because they were divisive. "Everyone who is entitled to a COVID stimulus check will receive a COVID stimulus check," he said. "I think people — Senators and the public alike — need to stop this divisiveness within our territory. ... There was an incredible amount of divisiveness created in the last administration because of stories like this that drive a wedge between our people... Everybody is going to get their check. And we really need to stop it and be adults about this... We need to be acting like adults. ... We're one people. Be a little patient and you will get your check."

The governor said the administration is prohibited by law from "fiddling with the way that the checks come out. The way that they're coming out is the way that they were entered into the system."

During the Wednesday hearing, Mr. Lee said that checks will be distributed based on tax filing, so persons who filed early would be first in line. Mr. Lee said this method represented the safest way to go about distributing the funds, which he argued would protect B.I.R. from lawsuits.

Both B.I.R. and the Dept. of Finance said about \$10 million worth of checks would be issued by the end of this week. Government House corroborated the comments with its own release.

COVID-19 Cases

Territorial Epidemiologist Dr. Esther Ellis said public health officials as of Thursday were tracking only two active cases of the coronavirus — a positive trend in the weeks leading up the soft opening of the V.I. economy.

Other related news:

There has been a sixth COVID-related death in the Territory: The 45-year-old son of the husband and wife from St. Croix who were the fourth and fifth victims.

To date, 1,278 individuals tested for the novel coronavirus. Of those, 1,164 were negative and 69 tests came back positive. No COVID-19 patients are hospitalized at Juan F. Luis Hospital on St. Croix and one patient is hospitalized on a ventilator at the Schneider Regional Medical Center on St. Thomas. That person [was aboard a vessel in severe respiratory distress](#) and was allowed into the territory for medical treatment and was immediately quarantined in accordance with strict medical protocol, Government House has said.

Sixty-one people infected with the virus have recovered. Forty-five tests results were pending as of Thursday.

Correction: May 15, 2020

Senator Vialet notified the Consortium today that though he initially said the total number of checks distributed was 2,995, he later corrected himself to state that 2,595 checks were distributed — 2,300 of which went to St. Thomas, and less than 300 to St. Croix. The story has been updated to reflect the correct information.

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