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Bryan Doubles Down on Mandatory Use of Disposable Cutlery for Restaurants

Culinary / **Published On June 16, 2020 05:58 AM /**

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Governor Albert Bryan said the public or local publications will not dissuade him from sticking to his decision to order the mandatory use of disposable cutlery at restaurants — even after fielding a massive backlash — because, he said, the lives and safety of Virgin Islanders from the deadly coronavirus disease remain his top priority.

The mandated use of disposable cutlery was originally scheduled to take effect on June 15. However, after an outcry from restaurant owners, the administration pushed the implementation date to June 22.

Responding to a Consortium question during his Monday press briefing, the governor said paramount to him was protecting the people of the territory.

"I certainly understand their concerns as somebody who likes to eat out myself. I feel their pain. But the reality of it is when I'm making these decisions, what I count on is my environmental health professionals; our epidemiologist. And this is a temporary thing, so I always think to myself when I read the paper, in a world pandemic where over 100,000 people in America alone have died, if the biggest problem in the Virgin Islands is we don't want to use plastic cutlery for 60 days, then I'm doing good, so I'll take that heat," Mr. Bryan said.

He added, "But I know at the end of the day it can't hurt and people are a lot safer when they get in a restaurant. At the end of the day it's not only about the individual... it's about what is good for the community. Because no one who is advocating for those glassware or cutlery, none of those people are responsible for the 100,000 souls that live here in the Virgin Islands. None of those people are going to be there when I have to call [Juan F. Luis Hospital Acting CEO Dyma Williams and Schneider Regional Medical Center CEO Dr. Luis Amaro] looking for resources and ventilators to keep people safe.

"None of those people are going to be there to help [VITEMA Director Daryl Jaschen] take the coffins and load them into those trailers like they were doing in the states. So I'm okay with it. And I understand everybody has a right to their opinion... [But] I don't make my decisions on what the paper writes or what the community writes when it comes to the health and welfare of Virgin Islanders."

The governor said that by the end of July or in August, an evaluation will take place and determination made as to whether to continue with the order.

The V.I. Department of Health cited the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's "Best Practices for Reopening Retail Food Establishments during the COVID-19 Pandemic Food Safety Checklist" in deciding to mandate use of disposable cutlery at restaurants. D.O.H. said the checklist strongly recommends the use of single-service and single-use products to decrease the spread of COVID-19.

"If what people are telling me that what's standing between them and me in being a little safer is a pack of paper plates — five dollars and ninety-nine cents — I could live with that," the governor concluded.

D.O.H. advised restaurants and bars to consider several strategies to maintain healthy environments. "Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces (e.g., door handles, cash registers, workstations, sink handles, bathroom stalls) at least daily, or as much as possible and as required by food safety requirements. Clean shared objects (e.g., payment terminals, tables, countertops/bars, receipt trays, condiment holders) between each use."