

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Trump To Visit U.S. Virgin Islands In Wake Of Irma; More Police, National Guard, Arrive On St. John

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President Donald Trump will visit the U.S. Virgin Islands "within the next six or seven days," Governor Kenneth Mapp said during a press conference at Government House late Monday. Mr. Mapp said he had a conversation with the president today, and Mr. Trump expressed his full support for the territory in providing disaster relief, following the calamitous state Hurricane Irma left St. Thomas and St. John in.

Mr. Trump wants "to see firsthand the damages of the territory, and to get on-ground reports of the federal operation, to ensure that the people of the Virgin Islands are receiving recovery as fast as humanly possible, and that the assets of the federal government were being appropriately deployed," the governor said. Mr. Trump said he

loves the U.S. Virgin Islands, Mr. Mapp added.

The advent of the president of the United States to the U.S. Virgin Islands to survey storm damage and assess the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (F.E.M.A.) response, is a big deal. The visit's potential benefits are many -- from recognition on a global level, to the president's stamp of approval that the U.S. Virgin Islands are as important as the mainland states, relative to federal relief, among other positive effects.

"The president wanted me to let the people of the Virgin Islands know that as he speaks of Hurricane victims going forward, that he definitely will be including the U.S. Virgin Islands in his list of places that the federal government will be taking care of," Mr. Mapp said.

Relative to St. John Mr. Mapp said Territorial Police Chief Winsbut McFarland deployed 17 additional police officers and soldiers to the island early this morning, to bolster enforcement efforts. He said 30 more soldiers were scheduled to depart St. Croix for St. John.

There had been rumors spreading online that St. John had descended into lawlessness, with criminal activity overtaking the island. But the governor said while there were reports of looting -- three ATMs were stolen and breached -- there were no victims of violence. Residents told The Consortium that some looting had occurred; they also mentioned the ATM incidents.

Mr. Mapp said police had located the ATM machines and that the matter was being investigated. "But as far as looting into businesses and looting into homes, we do not have any substantial evidence to say that that, in fact, occurred. Certainly there were no home invasions, no reports of persons being robbed, and that's as the police chief went through the Coral Bay community speaking with folks directly," Mr. Mapp said.

The governor said St. John residents were relieved to see more security presence on the island.

Six hundred Marines are now in the territory, 80 of whom will be deployed to St. John tomorrow. The Marines, along with security and other relief effort involvement, will aid in the removal of debris.

Governor Mapp said his administration identified two baseball fields where debris will be placed temporarily, as the cleanup effort ramps up. Because the task is so gargantuan, waste-hauling companies on St. Croix and from elsewhere will be needed in the St. Thomas-St. John District.

The administration is working with another law enforcement entity to bring in additional force to help the V.I.P.D., particularly in the St. Thomas-St. John District. Mr. Mapp did not say which police force the officers would come from.

By Thursday, the Dept. of Labor will give details about unemployment benefits for displaced workers as a result of Irma, Mr. Mapp said.

Tonight, an aircraft carrying journalists from around the country was set to arrive on St. Croix. They will depart the island for St. Thomas as 7:30 a.m. tomorrow, to assess the

relief effort, as well as tour affected locations. Mr. Mapp said the idea is to "tell our story," noting that people have been running with their own narratives and posting their opinions of the territory following the storm, as truth -- some of it harmful to the image of the territory -- an image the USVI is heavily reliant on, as it depends on tourism for a great portion of its revenues.

The governor warned residents against using their boats to ferry Tortola residents to the USVI. He cautioned that such actions could land perpetrators into serious trouble with the Department of Homeland Security.

Mr. Mapp revealed that the prison in the BVI was breached, and said that the government there was working to contain the situation. "So you may be picking up someone and don't know that you're picking up someone that may have gotten out of the penal system," he said. "But it is not legal for you to take a private craft, pick folks up in the British Virgin Islands and attempt to bring them to the USVI."

WAPA advised that 80 percent of Savan will be energized tonight. Garden Street will have power, the Knud Hansen shelter will have power, as well as a portion of Hospital Ground, according to the governor.

Government workers will receive their pay via direct deposit and check Thursday, although it will not include overtime. Mr. Mapp said overtime pay was not included because of the storm and lack of electricity. "Everyone will receive their 80-hour allotment," he said, with a potential secondary payroll for overtime work as operations ramp up.

The administration is working on clock-in locations for government employees in the St. Thomas-St. John District, which Mr. Mapp said will be used to determine whether employees are in the territory. If employees fail to check in by Friday, "we're going to put you on excused leave without pay on Monday," Mr. Mapp said, stressing the need to check-in as important. The governor had previously asked all government employees to report to work for at least 3 hours daily to aid in the recovery of the district. Now, the intent is to commence 20-hour work-weeks beginning Monday, although it was not clear if employees would be paid for the 40 hours, or the full 80 hours.