

The Virgin Islands Consortium

'Worst Of Hurricane Maria Over,' Mapp Tells St. Croix Business Community

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ST. CROIX -- Before a packed house at Government House here, Governor Kenneth Mapp, William Vogel, federal coordinating officer of FEMA Region II, and other members of the governor's executive team held a meeting with the business community to discuss the administration's progress as well as to field concerns from the private sector.

Mr. Mapp started off the meeting by giving an update of the relief effort on the island. He expressed extreme optimism for the future of the U.S. Virgin Islands. "The worst of the hurricane really is over. Our ability to find a common purpose, notwithstanding our diversity of interest towards the rebirth and rebuilding of the Virgin Islands is what will make it happen," the governor said. "If we are able to move past the despair, we will

have a more resilient Virgin Islands.”

As part of Mr. Mapp's vision of rebuilding a resilient USVI, he spoke of putting the power lines underground, reexamining the building codes, buying residents out of certain properties to mitigate flooding, and allowing proper drainage. The work to put power lines underground won't happen in the current effort to restore power to the territory, however. The governor told The Consortium at one of his daily press briefings that doing so would snail the pace of power restoration. Instead, Mr. Mapp is hoping to work with federal partners on funding and other forms of aid, to see the project through.

The territory's leader hopes that by the end of October, St. Croix and St. Thomas will both be able to host cruise ships. He also spoke of reconstruction being the biggest economic driver in the territory for the next 18-24 months. Mr. Mapp also spoke off separating the Virgin Islands recovery effort from that of Puerto Rico, and he restated [Vice President Mike Pence's visit to St. Croix on Friday](#). Mr. Pence, along with his wife, will get an aerial view of Hurricane Maria's damage to the island, and speak with victims of the storms to hear their stories, as well as their experience with the local government and FEMA.

WAPA Executive Director Julio Rhymer spoke about the arduous process of power restoration. Many business owners asked about a possible timeline for eventual power restoration. Mr. Rhymer explained that assessments were still being conducted, street by street, pole by pole, and many times those assessments have to be redone, because residents are either cutting the lines, or are crashing into them during curfew hours, and this sets back the timeline for power restoration.

Department of Tourism Commissioner Beverly Nicholson-Doty talked about rebranding the territory and each island's tourism product after the storm. She spoke of an online portal that has been created to interact in real time with business owners in the USVI. Mrs. Nicholson-Doty also spoke of two separate teams that will be formed for each district from her office, that will go into the community and access the various businesses in the community.

Virgin Islands Police Department Commissioner Delroy Richards responded to requests about extending the curfew hours and allowing a return of nightlife in the territory by talking about the danger that exist at night, and the many incidents that his officers have responded to even with the curfew in effect. He said as things improve, he hopes to recommend to the governor an extension of the daylight hours, with the hope of St. Croix eventually seeing a 6:00 a.m.- 6:00 p.m. curfew time frame.

Community Updates