

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Ends Curfew, Issues \$3 Million In Tax Refunds; DSNAP To Rollout Mid-November

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Stating that he was not a fan of "arresting the civil liberties of free citizens," Governor Kenneth Mapp during his hurricane recovery press briefing on Monday, ended the territory-wide curfew. The move comes nearly two months after [Hurricane Irma devastated St. Thomas](#), and more than 6 weeks following [Hurricane Maria's ravaging of St. Croix](#). And it comes as the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority (WAPA) continues to make progress with power restoration -- 38 percent of St. Thomas has been restored, 19 percent of St. Croix and 14 percent of St. John. But with most of the territory's main thoroughfares still dark, and all but two traffic lights on St. Croix operable as of Monday, Mr. Mapp urged residents to be careful.

"One step closer to recovery and there is no curfew that will be in effect this evening, giving free rein to the community to move as you deem appropriate -- I simply ask that you be careful on the roadway. We have much work to do," Mr. Mapp said as he ended the restriction.

The governor announced that his administration delivered \$3 million worth of tax refund checks in the mail on Monday, an announcement that will come as welcomed news to many.

Mr. Mapp told The Consortium that the Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (DSNAP) would see a rollout between November 12-17. He said a press release would be issued sometime this week to inform residents about the requirements for qualification.

Here are the other important pieces of news from Monday's press briefing:

1. The Department of Labor's request for extension of the disaster unemployment assistance program has been approved, and residents territory-wide now have until December 29 to apply. The program provides unemployment benefits to individuals who have become unemployed as a direct result of a presidentially declared major disaster.
2. Mona Barnes, the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA) director, said that persons still in need of food supplies and tarpaulins, should contact VITEMA at 340-773-2244 on St. Croix, or 340-774-2244 for the St. Thomas-St. John District.
3. Mr. Mapp met with members of the Legislature on Monday along with Stacey Plaskett, the delegate to Congress, where the leaders discussed a range of matters, most pertinent being the governor's upcoming visit to Washington where he is to lobby on behalf of the territory for its billions of dollars in request to rebuild following the storms. Of importance at the meeting was the need for all elected officials -- senators, the delegate and the governor -- to be on the same page when on Capitol Hill speaking with leaders.
4. On November 14, Mr. Mapp will testify before two committee in Congress: the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, and the House Committee on Natural Resources. The governor will bring along with him a delegation of USVI leaders, to include senators, as part of the effort to successful win Congress's backing of the territory's over \$5 billion request. Working to setup meetings in Washington will be the government's attorneys in Washington and Ms. Plaskett's office.
5. When the governor announced the territory's request to Congress for \$5.5 billion to rebuild after the storms, he described the total as "[a comprehensive and thoughtful examination of our damages and recovery requirements](#)." On Monday, however, the governor said the \$5.5 billion was not an accurate sum of the damages exacted on the territory by the hurricanes, and that he would be updating the figure sometime this week. In giving an example of how the assessment could grow, Mr. Mapp said administration officials only on Monday learned that the roof of Government House on St. Croix was breached by Hurricane Maria
6. The governor said he would work with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to help modernize the territory's intersections with signs giving clear directions and the proper naming of streets. This would be done, he said,

along with WAPA's installation of traffic lights across the territory. The idea is to get an off-island team to help with the effort, Mr. Mapp said.

7. The hundreds of millions of dollars to be made available to the USVI in loans, of which the territory is assured \$500 million over the course of three fiscal years, with another \$300 million up for grabs between the territory and Puerto Rico, Mr. Mapp said the Dept. of Finance was in the process of applying for the first batch of funds, which he said should be received in weeks. He did not say how much, but the funds would be used to help the government makeup for lost revenues, and will be used for a variety of government operations.
8. V.I.P.D. Commissioner Delroy Richards said the help from off-island law enforcement and servicemen have greatly aided the local police department's efforts in curtailing crime and security communities across the territory.
9. Relative to the use of generators, Mr. Richards urged residents to be considerate of their neighbors when using the electricity-providing equipment. He said 7 individuals were recently hospitalized in St. Thomas for carbon monoxide poisoning caused by the extensive use of a generator in a nearby apartment.
10. Regarding the curfew being lifted, the commissioner said the V.I.P.D.'s saturated patrols will continue, and he pleaded with residents to be vigilant and careful when driving at nights, as the roads throughout the territory are still mostly dark.
11. The governor made a request for temporary housing units to be brought into the territory for hurricane survivors still living in shelters. He said local inventory is not enough to satisfy the demand of temporary housing. The governor was also clear that he did not want trailers for temporary housing to be brought into the territory.
12. Mr. Mapp will meet with Disney's CEO in St. Thomas on Wednesday to talk cruise tourism and other important matters.
13. Water Island will receive its own power restoration crew, and the island, because of its size, should be restored quickly, Mr. Mapp said.
14. William Vogel, federal coordinating officer of FEMA Region II, said 31,500 persons had registered for individual assistance as of Monday, with FEMA making available over \$10 million so far. Mr. Vogel said the Small Business Association approved 250 home loans and 12 business loans as of Monday, for a total of \$22 million in the low-interest loan programs. The Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has received over 265 assessment requests, and as of Monday had completed 240. USACE has also installed 130 generators. Additionally, 134,000 cubic yards of debris have been removed.
15. For its temporary job program, FEMA has received 1,000 résumés, interviewed 350 persons from the 1,000 applications, and has approved 85 persons for security check and review. The temporary FEMA jobs program includes only 185 positions, and FEMA will continue its vetting process until all the positions are filled. "Nobody knows this place better than the people who live here," Mr. Vogel said.

Feature Image: Parts of La Reine Shopping Center after Hurricane Maria. (Credit: [Irene Ali Photography](#))