

The Virgin Islands Consortium

FEMA Approves VI Government's Application For Community Disaster Loan; DSNAP Sees 7,400 Applicants In Three Days

Disaster Recovery / **Published On November 09, 2017 09:34 AM /**

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As he was about to close his press briefing on Wednesday, Governor Kenneth Mapp slipped a quick line that wound up being one of the most important pieces of news relayed during the short briefing: The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has approved the territory's request for a community disaster loan, which makes available \$500 million to the government over the course three fiscal years.

The funds are part of a \$36.5 billion disaster relief measure Congress approved last month. Of that amount, \$500 million in low-interest loans was set aside for the USVI for

revenue loss as a result of the storms, while another \$300 million was available for the USVI and Puerto Rico. As for Puerto Rico, the island secured \$4.1 billion in low-interest loans from the \$36.5 billion for itself. On November 14, Mr. Mapp will testify in Congress on behalf of the territory, making the case as to why the USVI should receive an estimated \$7.5 billion -- an amount informed by an assessment of the hurricanes' damage to the USVI -- to help rebuild. Puerto Rico's Hurricane Maria assessment is \$95 billion.

How much of the \$500 million will be released in the first batch, the governor did not say, but he said the funds would be used to support the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority, the territory's hospitals and the central government. Separately, WAPA board late Wednesday [approved a \\$75 million community disaster loan](#) application.

"The loan represents our projected revenue loss on existing essential functions of WAPA's operations. Should we receive approval for this loan, the funding will be drawn down from the date of approval until July 2018, as conditions require," Julio Rhymer, WAPA's executive director, told board members before they voted unanimously in favor of the loan. The term of the loan is for 16 years and repayment would begin on October 1, 2018. The interest rate will be equivalent to the current market yields on similar obligations of the U.S. government as determined by the secretary of the Treasury. An interest rate will be determined separately for each drawdown, WAPA said.

Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (DSNAP)

Evril Powell, Department of Human Services (D.H.S.) assistant commissioner announced during the briefing that 7,400 Virgin Islanders had applied for DSNAP since Monday. She did not say how many people were approved or failed to qualify, but said the department would request an extension from the federal government as the 7-day limit -- which ends on November 15, excluding weekends -- is quickly approaching and the department was not certain that all residents in need of DSNAP would be able to apply by then. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (U.S.D.A.) approved \$23 million worth of DSNAP for 38,000 households in the USVI. But with its current speed, D.H.S. will have only signed up only 17,266 households, leaving another 20,734 households without the opportunity to apply.

It remains to be seen whether U.S.D.A. will approve D.H.S.'s request.

Part of the problem is that many individuals who may qualify for DSNAP are working during the hours of application. To help mitigate this issue, D.H.S. will be using mobile signup units at large government department and agencies, giving employees the opportunity to apply without leaving work, according to both Mr. Mapp and Ms. Powell.

We've included the important things you need to know when applying [here](#). Application hours vary, but when it was first announced, D.H.S. Commissioner Felecia Blyden said application processing would be from 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Below are the territory-wide locations:

St. Croix:

Dept. of Human Services Mars Hill Headquarters in Frederiksted

The Cardiac Center at the Juan F. Luis Hospital

The Richmond Senior Center

St. Thomas:

Knud Hansen Complex

The University of the Virgin Islands

Frenchtown Evangelical Church

Tutu Park Mall

St. John:

Dept. of Human Services Multipurpose Building

Betsy DeVos visits USVI

Mr. Mapp said he met with Betsy DeVos, U.S. secretary of education, for about two hours in St. Thomas on Wednesday, and spoke with the secretary about the need to build more resilient schools. The governor said Ms. DeVos had a chance to see the damage that the Addelita Cancryn Junior High School sustained during Hurricane Irma, and also visited the Charlotte Amalie High School. Thereafter, the secretary stopped at the University of the Virgin Islands, where she was scheduled to meet with Dr. David Hall, UVI president.

Mr. Mapp said while he did not believe that all the condemned schools would be rebuilt, those that will should be constructed to be resilient to hurricanes, which would mitigate school closures following the passage of powerful storms.

While the territory's public schools were closed for over a month following the hurricanes, private and parochial schools were accepting students previously enrolled in the public educational system -- in some instances at no cost to parents. Mr. Mapp said instead of uprooting these students from the private school system, the government through the Dept. of Education (D.O.E.) would instead make "substantial contributions," in the form of funds and perhaps supplies, to allow students to finish the school year at the private institutions.

Dept. of Health community survey

The Department of Health (D.O.H.) on Wednesday began conducting a community survey, whose goal is to assess community needs after the hurricanes and to help guide the ongoing response efforts, according to D.O.H. Commissioner Michelle Davis.

The event is called a Community Assessment for Public Health Emergency Response (CASPER). D.O.H. staff will be visiting various neighborhoods to conduct house-to-house surveys. These employees will be credentialed with a D.O.H. identification card and will be conducting the surveys outside of homes. No personal information will be asked, and no entry or assessment of homes is needed to conduct the survey, Ms. Davis said.

CASPER Community Survey Dates:

St. Croix: CASPER Training: Wednesday, November 8th -- 12:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m.
CASPER Surveys: Thursday, November 9th -- 12:00 p.m. -6:00 p.m. Friday, November 10th -- 12:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m.

St. Thomas/St. John CASPER Training: Monday, November 13th – 9:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m.
CASPER Surveys: Tuesday, November 14th -- 12:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m. Wednesday, November 15th – 12:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m.

FEMA's efforts so far

Although Friday is recognized as Veterans Day holiday and will be recognized in the territory, FEMA Disaster Recovery Centers (D.R.C.) will open across the territory, according to William Vogel, federal coordinating officer of FEMA Region II. Local schools will also open on Friday, according to Mr. Mapp, as part of D.O.E.'s efforts to regain lost time.

Almost 3,000 blue roofs have been installed, Mr. Vogel said; over 14,000 people have visited the D.R.C.s; 33,000 residents territory-wide have registered for assistance; 175,000 cubic yards of debris have been removed; the Army Corps of Engineers have installed roughly 140 generators (they have also uninstalled 15 as the facilities where they were mounted have regained power); and FEMA has made available so far \$83.7 million following the storms: \$33.7 million in low-interest loans for homeowners, renters and businesses, \$8.4 million in temporary housing assistance, and over \$41 million in assistance to the V.I. government.

Feature Image: St. Croix residents wait in line at the Cardiac Center at the Juan F. Luis Hospital to apply for DSNAP. (Ernice Gilbert, VIC)