

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Week Of Lobbying: Delegation Of VI Government Officials Descends On Washington With \$7.5 Billion Request

VIC News / **Published On November 12, 2017 12:24 PM /**

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ST. CROIX -- It's been roughly two months since Hurricanes Irma and Maria made landfall in the U.S. Virgin Islands, bringing the territory of just over 100,000 residents to a standstill -- disrupting daily lives, work, commerce and education. The advent of the storms also shattered the local government, which was already struggling with debt and a junk-status credit rating, and brought the economy to its knees, wreaking havoc on the islands' healthcare systems, its utility company and other critical services needed in any functioning society.

And while some form of normalcy is beginning to take hold in the U.S. Virgin Islands, infrastructure here remains severely damaged -- some roads are almost impassable, over 7 schools have been condemned, the hospitals have been evacuated --- and if it were not for a \$500 million low-interest loan from the federal government to shore up the V.I. government, whose revenues had all but dried up, the territory would eventually collapse.

Now, a delegation of government officials from various departments and agencies, senators along with Governor Kenneth Mapp, head to Washington Sunday to make the government's case for more federal aid, \$7.49 billion to be exact. They will coordinate with the office of Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett in Washington, hold meetings with congresspeople, and Mr. Mapp will testify before the Senate and House Committees on Energy and Natural Resources this week.

The goal here is to win Congressional support for the \$7.49 billion ask, which follows an assessment of damage sustained during Hurricanes Irma and Maria. By comparison, Puerto Rico's initial estimate of damage was \$95 billion.

Congressional leaders have indicated their willingness to help the USVI rebuild sustainably, and have spoken of the need for power grids more resilient to the increasing ferocity of the tropical season. Kevin McCarthy, a Republican from California and majority leader of the U.S. House of Representatives, along with Steny H. Hoyer, a Democrat from Maryland and House minority whip, recently wrote a joint opinion in The Washington Post, titled, "Congress Hasn't Forgotten About The Islands". The article suggests that the U.S.V.I., along with Puerto Rico, will not be left to fend for themselves in the aftermath of the deadly storms.

"We had departed Washington as Democratic and Republican members on a mission to see for ourselves the devastation caused by the hurricanes. We returned as fellow Americans imbued with a shared sense that Congress must work together to do more to help the people we met — and uplifted by their extraordinary resilience in the face of hardship," reads the write-up on [The Post](#).

The Virgin Islands delegation will be in Washington for roughly two weeks, and its efforts while there will help determine the amount -- if not all -- of the \$7.49 billion request will be received.

"We have in this moment both an opportunity and a responsibility to ensure that the greatest good emerges from this calamity to our Virgin Islands. This is an opportunity to not just rebuild but to create an exponentially better Virgin Islands. The message we hope to leave with members of Congress next week is to request that they provide the USVI with the resources necessary to rebuild stronger than before, and hope that Congress will support our fellow citizens for as long it takes for them to get back on their feet," said Ms. Plaskett.