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'It's War on the Streets', Bryan Says as He Called on Virgin Islanders to Stop Shielding Criminal Family Members

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Shooting in Golden Rock on June 4, 2020 near Domino's Pizza that left a man critically wounded. By. VI CONSORTIUM

Governor Albert Bryan started his coronavirus response update on Monday talking about the gun violence that continues to rock the U.S. Virgin Islands, describing it as "another serious public health and safety issue."

"Unfortunately we have lost eight people to the coronavirus here in the territory since we officially began our response in March. In that same timeframe, we have lost almost three times as many Virgin Islanders to senseless gun violence and a lot more to gunshot wounds," Mr. Bryan said.

The governor repeated a plea that has been stated by governors before him but has not had the kind of result the V.I. Police Department or administrations have desired: calling on residents to provide information to police that may result in the arrest of criminals.

"It's very easy for us to point the finger at law enforcement and the powers that be, including myself. But the hard truth is that no law enforcement that does not involve information and cooperation from the community will stop this from reoccurring. It certainly hasn't in the past and it's unlikely that it will in the future," he said.

The governor said the V.I. Police Department has been working hard and making progress on solving violent crimes and bringing to justice perpetrators, but added, "the senseless retaliation continues," and the V.I.P.D. "can use your help."

Mr. Bryan spoke of a picture making the rounds on social media, mainly WhatsApp, showing a group of young individuals, some with markers on them indicating those who have been killed. "What have we come to?" asked the governor.

He added, "We have to decide as a community that we're not going to stand for this; that we are going to take it upon ourselves to tell our friends and families, neighbors, nieces, aunts, cousins — that you're doing wrong."

The governor spoke of the recent Black Lives Matter protests that started on the U.S. mainland following the killing of George Floyd by the hands of police on May 25, protests that eventually arrived in the USVI.

"Just two months ago we were out here campaigning, protesting about Black Lives Matter, and here we have black young men killing black young men in our streets like it's a video game. We have to act united on this front. Enough with the candle-lighting and the walking up and down the streets. Let's put our money where our mouth is and react to what is going on in our community," the governor said.

Asked about the concerns residents have with providing information to police, fearing their identities won't remain anonymous, Mr. Bryan said [Crime Stoppers USVI](#) remains a safe bet for those wary of providing information to police. The governor even stated that he had spoken to someone who had provided anonymous information to Crime Stoppers and received a monetary reward.

Relative to the administration's efforts to combat the violence, Mr. Bryan spoke of the [long-delayed](#) camera system to be installed territory wide [by the end of the year](#). "If we had that up we could probably identify those individuals passing stoplights... that commit some of these crimes," he said.

"We are also doing some things to reinforce the amount of manpower by shifting people out of various departments and into the streets," he said. For those who took and failed the police test, Mr. Bryan said his administration was looking into ways the V.I.P.D. could give them a second opportunity to join the force.

"But if you have people that are going to lie in wait for hours on end and ambush a young man on the way to work, in a tactical style like a professional Navy Seal, all of the crime-stopping initiatives that we're doing is not going to stop that. What's going to stop that is our community saying no to allowing our young men to carry guns," he said.

Mr. Bryan spoke of tough stances that must be taken, including appointing judges who are going to "lock them up forever," speaking of violent criminals, while working to rehabilitate and put on solid footing those with a path forward.

"When wrong happens in our community, we like to hide behind and condone it... instead of saying wrong is wrong," Mr. Bryan said.

He added, "Whoever gets locked up, or whoever does wrong, ain't nobody writing no letters for them and talking about why they have an AK-47 with two magazines and shooting up cars and is an honor student. That's what we need to develop in order to keep our community safe."

He said as long as family members continue to put up their homes to post bail so that loved ones who have committed violent crimes could be under house arrest instead of being behind bars, the problems will continue.

"It's getting to a point now where it's war on the streets," he said.

Asked by the Consortium about the real issue of poverty and inequality in the community and whether the administration had been working to correct this deep-seated issue, the governor said, "Not everybody in this community is the little man; there are people who need to do better."

Mr. Bryan spoke of tougher initiatives his administration would like to introduce — including raiding turfs, kicking down doors warrantless and other tactics that would dismantle criminal rings faster — if certain laws weren't in place.

He then said, "The poverty in our community, we are working so hard to do things like give young people the schools that they deserve. We set aside \$10 million in programs at [the Dept. of Labor] for workforce development; we went ahead and put the money out there so people could get their WAPA bill paid."

The governor then said the USVI was the only U.S. jurisdiction that issued stimulus checks; though it was not clear what point Mr. Bryan was trying to make as on the U.S. mainland, stimulus checks and tax refunds are issued to Americans directly from the Internal Revenue Service.

The governor said he would like to see every child who receive child support payments collect a minimum of \$400 per month. "This thing about the father ain't working and what not so the father can't afford to pay. Whether the father working or not that child needs to eat. But we can't do it because the federal government is involved," he said.