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Bryan Eyes New Strategy in Covid-19 Battle: Keep USVI Open, Manage Coronavirus Infections

Coronavirus / **Published On August 05, 2020 04:55 AM /**

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Governor Bryan wears mask during tour of National Guard building retrofitted as Covid-19 Alternate Care Facility in April 2020. By. VI CONSORTIUM.

Governor Albert Bryan will most likely keep the U.S. Virgin Islands open for the foreseeable future during the coronavirus pandemic, even as infections continue to mount territory-wide and the dreaded "community spread" means of transmitting the disease is increasing.

On Monday, 24 coronavirus cases were reported. That's on top of some 32 positive cases reported over the weekend. And on Tuesday the Dept. of Health reported 18 new cases of the virulent disease — that's 74 new cases from Friday through Tuesday.

During an interview Monday morning with the Consortium while attending an event at the dragstrip near the airport road on St. Croix, Mr. Bryan spoke of a balancing act between economic activity and managing the virus. Previously the governor said if Covid-19 cases continued to grow on St. Croix and St. Thomas, he would move the territory back to the "Safer at Home" phase of reopening, where non-essential businesses would have to close and hotel reservations halted, in an effort to blunt the spread of the virus.

That's no longer the strategy, Mr. Bryan indicated. Now, it's managing the virus through treatment, a decision guided by the belief that the virus is going to be around for a long time and therefore the territory must adapt.

"At the end of the day Albert Bryan makes the decision on whether we're going to open or close. Not anybody else. one man. And I think we've done a great job of being able to keep it open and keep people healthy. Yes we have a lot of cases, but the problem isn't getting the cases, the problem is dying. So we have the facilities and continue to grow our facilities in terms of treating people and making sure that they come out alive," Mr. Bryan said.

Of the new strategy, the governor said, "That shift comes as a result of remember, when we started doing this, we thought we would be done by summer and then we would be okay. The realization that it's not going to end anytime soon — even if we get a vaccine, we still have another year at least — and coronavirus is going to be around for years. So the most important thing now is being able to manage your hospitals and being able to make sure that people stay alive."

He added, "Nobody gives us credit that it's not in our senior homes; it's not in our prisons. We haven't had that kind of fallout and even when you look at the statistics, six people died when we were in the Safer at Home phase. We've been open now 60 days, we've recorded two deaths, and both of those people didn't come to the hospital; they came in an emergency mode. We've been able to take people into the hospital and discharge them."

Mr. Bryan said his decision to keep the territory open during the pandemic allowed the government to collect much-needed funds to keep government operations afloat. Even so, he foresees a \$120 million budget shortfall with Gross Receipt Taxes down 28 percent, while Income Tax collection saw growth.

"We're going to get another blow next year because we didn't make no money this year, so we're not going to collect enough taxes next year. We have to brace for that as we go into the new fiscal year," he said.

As for performance in managing the pandemic, Mr. Bryan said, "I think my team has down an excellent job. He said he had spoken to someone who traveled from one state to another and saw no temperature checks being performed and no mandatory use of masks.

"So when people compare us, who are they comparing us to?" he said. The governor quoted this individual as stating the USVI was ahead "of what everybody else is doing."

While a number of U.S. states [in June](#) were requiring negative Covid-19 tests along with mandatory quarantine before a visitor would be allowed to enter, the territory was still behind and Mr. Bryan was still hesitant on implementing such protocols.

"Our team is doing very very well, and when you compare what is going on in the United States, it's not evident here in the Virgin Islands," he said.

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