

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp, Carson, Announce Record-Setting \$1.6 Billion For U.S. Virgin Islands

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Governor Kenneth Mapp and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (H.U.D.) Secretary, Ben Carson, announced in Washington today an unprecedented \$1.6 billion in funding to the U.S. Virgin Islands, through H.U.D.'s Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) Program, funds to be used to address seriously damaged housing, businesses and infrastructure from major disasters that occurred since 2015.

The announcement is significant for the territory, and could help propel a resurgence of the U.S.V.I.'s flailing economy by providing thousands of jobs in a variety of sectors, while attracting new businesses willing to setup shop in the Virgin Islands because of

what would be a vastly improved infrastructure.

"Today's community development block grant, disaster recovery to the U.S. Virgin Islands represents a large investment in disaster. This is an investment in the future for the people of the Virgin Islands," Mr. Carson said while speaking during the joint press conference.

Today's grant announcement along with H.U.D.'s [February grant of \\$243 million](#), brings H.U.D.'s total investment in the territory's recovery to \$1.82 billion."

"Our goal is to get people back into their homes, get people back to work, to build a stronger U.S. Virgin Islands for future generations," Mr. Carson said. "These grants will restore homes and jobs, and repair critical infrastructure like roads, bridges, sewers, waterways, and also the island's electrical grid."

The grant is part of \$28 billion being provided to 9 U.S. states, along with Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, with Puerto Rico receiving the lion's share of \$18.4 billion. Second largest sum of over \$4 billion went to Texas, while the U.S.V.I. received the third largest sum.

For Mr. Mapp, the \$1.6 billion along with the February H.U.D. provision of \$243 million, will lead the U.S. Virgin Islands to a future not only ready to withstand major storms, but a more prosperous one, bolstered by an injection of federal dollars that can be used in a wide array of areas.

He said the funds will go "a tremendous way in [providing] new housing stock; we're going to invest a chunk of that into the dredging and cleaning of the Charlotte Amalie Harbor and [the Gallows Bay Channel](#); we're going to be putting a good bit of these dollars into road construction and repair," pursuant to U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration standards.

The governor said housing facilities such as the Herbert Grigg Home for the Aged on St. Croix, and the Queen Luis Home for the Aged on St. Thomas, will see a complete "redo," bringing them up to C.M.S. standards.

Funds will be provided to the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority for power generation systems, and another 20 megawatts of renewable energy sources upon the 10 megawatts currently available, according to Mr. Mapp. "You're going to see wind towers on the south shore of St. Croix and on the south shore of St. Thomas," the governor said, adding that the six schools that he expects to be approved for demolition and reconstruction, would also host solar panels on their roofs.

The territory's leader also spoke of working to remediate potable water systems, which has been reported to release discolored water. "We're going to expand the potable water systems so that low and moderate income communities have access to clean, fresh, water," he said, adding broadly, "It's just an opportunity to really advance the benefit of the territory in preparing for the future."

Next week Friday the administration will submit to H.U.D. its first plan to use some of the \$243 million received in February. And in 60 to 90 days, Mr. Mapp said he would provide another plan to H.U.D. after community input.

As to the how the funds will be released to the local government, Mr. Carson told The Consortium that the money will sit in the U.S. Treasury, "and they are drawn down as needed, based on the plan submitted and the approvals that are provided," he said.

The rebuilding of structures and infrastructure will also adhere to hurricane-resistant codes, with Mr. Mapp stating that while the current codes that were implemented following Hurricane Hugo are formidable, his administration would be making recommendations to the Legislature for additional hardening.

"At the end of the day, they're going to be built pursuant to the codes because we have to follow the law, and of course we want them to be able to withstand the onslaught of storms where they can protect people and not have the devastation and the destruction that storms can bring," the governor said.

On managing the funds and accountability, Mr. Mapp told The Consortium that systems will be put in place to satisfy such demands "to demonstrate that we're using them pursuant to law, and we can account for their use the way they need to be accounted for."

During [a December meeting](#) with cabinet members, the governor conveyed to department and agency heads the importance of being prepared for the work ahead. During today's interview with The Consortium, Mr. Mapp reiterated this message. "The biggest ones are the Department of Property and Procurement and the Department of Justice, who have to handle all procurement contracts for the government," he said.

The boon in federal aid has been working in Mr. Mapp's favor, and it couldn't come at a better time for the hurricane-time leader. This is an election year, and politicians are jockeying to place themselves in the best possible position to challenge the governor. But, as of now, and with pending federal and private investments yet to be announced, whoever faces Mr. Mapp will find it challenging to overcome such odds.