

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Says There Will Be No 'Snags' In Accessing Federal Dollars

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ST. CROIX -- Governor Kenneth Mapp spoke with The Consortium on Wednesday to respond to an article the online paper published relative to a possible block in territory's way of receiving the billions of dollars in federal funding made available following the 2017 storms. The article relied on the governor's own quote while speaking to Department of Interior (D.O.I.) officials in Washington last week, where Mr. Mapp said the territory's fiscal position made it difficult to meet the local match needed to secure certain federal funding.

According to D.O.I., Mr. Mapp acknowledged the territory's long road to recovery, and it was discussed that various federal disaster recovery programs available to Virgin Islands

require a local funds match from 10 to 25 percent of the project. Mr. Mapp explained that the loss in government revenues due to the hurricanes further stressed the government's fiscal position and its ability to meet the local matching fund requirements for various federal programs that were critical to forwarding the territory's continuing recovery.

But in a conversation with The Consortium on Wednesday, the governor said the local government had no blocks in its way to accessing the funds. He said a plan was being prepared that would soon be presented to the federal government for use of the \$243 million presented to the local government by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (H.U.D.) in February.

The governor explained that the local funding match is actually included in the monies being provided by the federal government, stressing the point several times.

The governor's comments were backed up by that of Gloria Shanahan, H.U.D.'s regional public affairs officer for Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. "Not only there is no requirement for matching funds under CDBG-DR [Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery], in fact its funds can be used as the match for other Federal programs," she wrote in an email.

When asked about his comments to the Department of Interior, the governor admitted that the explanation he gave to this reporter sounded confusing, but said the main point was there were no issues in accessing the federal dollars.

"I just want to leave with you that we don't have any difficulty in accessing these dollars. The next step is putting the plan in place, getting the community involved, and getting the approval from H.U.D.," Mr. Mapp said. "Once H.U.D. signs on, they may say we need more information on this, we need more information on that, but once H.U.D. says, 'okay, it's approved,' that means go do the project and draw the funds down against the projects."

He added: "The objective here is to try to get every available dollar to the territory and that it don't end up in some accounting process that we're playing marbles with dollars; we want the money in the recovery and reconstruction on the territory."

Asking for a waiver and receiving one, Mr. Mapp explained, would mean all the federal funds would go towards the rebuilding of the territory, and the governor vowed to continue pressing for the exemptions.

During his meetings with D.O.I. officials last week, including Secretary Ryan Zinke and FEMA Administrator Brock Long, Mr. Zinke explained that under the Insular Areas Act, the D.O.I. is required to waive any local match requirements. Under the provisions of 48 U.S. Code § 1469a, however, the administering authority of any department or agency is authorized to waive, at its discretion, any requirement for matching funds otherwise required by law to be provided by the Insular Areas.

D.O.I. said Mr. Zinke led a robust discussion around the applications and implications of various provisions of the Insular Area Act that concluded with Mr. Zinke and the Mr. Long agreeing to seek the broadest implementation of the Act that will allow the Virgin Islands the greatest access to available funding.

