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Bryan to Restaurants: Break Rules and Get Shutdown for 30 Days; Funeral Attendance Now Limited to 10; Boaters Face \$10k Fine for Violating Guidelines

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Governor Albert Bryan announced Monday that his administration would start strictly enforcing Covid-19 rules at restaurants in an effort to blunt the spread of the virus. Mr. Bryan also limited funeral attendance to only family members of no more than 10.

On restaurants, the governor said he thought "long and hard" about what to do, eventually settling on strict enforcement of all guidelines put in place. Restaurants found to be wanting will be shutdown for 30 days, and will be subject to fines, Mr. Bryan said.

"We're going to give this a try. So we're going to tighten on this pipe that's leaking this virus into our community. We did so by the closure of bars, the imposition of restrictions at the airports. We

had in our minds that we would put in an 8:00 p.m. curfew and we would shut down restaurants to takeout only. But we're not going to do that. We're going to fine the culprits that are having these mass gathering events — people congregating outside, drinking and having a good time; not adhering to social distancing — we're going to shut it down 30 days no questions asked."

"We don't want to penalize the majority for the actions of a few," Mr. Bryan said.

On funerals, the governor said, "We're getting too much of that close contact between your friends, neighbors and your family members." Mr. Bryan said funerals also pose an issue because many family members travel to attend. "We have seen too many funerals [serving] as mass gathering events where people in their time of grief naturally want to embrace each other."

The governor also announced new restrictions for the boating community. "We have seen boat parties that violate all of our social distancing and other health guidelines," Mr. Bryan said. He said the rule-breaking was taking place at beaches and cays in and around the territory.

The governor announced the banning rafting, or tying boats together, during the pandemic and until the ban is lifted. Additionally, vessels must maintain a 12-foot distance from each other, unless there is a medical emergency. And vessels cannot anchor in designated swimming areas. Violators of the rules may be fined \$10,000 or more per incident, and even have the vessel confiscated by the Gov't of the Virgin Islands.

For those wanting to see a curtailing of travelers to the territory, which could be accomplished by halting reservations, the governor pointed to statistics that show travel-related Covid-19 cases as the means through which the coronavirus is spread the least.

According to the governor, to date 69 cases have been related to travel; 268 close contact; 145 community spread; and 65 cases were under investigation as of Monday, according to Dept. of Health data shared by the governor.

Mr. Bryan stressed the importance of wearing face masks and urged Virgin Islanders to follow guidelines and stay away from gatherings. He said social events "where individuals are not adhering to the guidelines issued by the CDC and by the Dept. of Health, including "house parties, the family get-togethers, the repast after the funeral — the little events that we're doing in the community, and trusting that the people who we love and know and break bread with everyday do not have the virus.

"But they may," he said, "so we all have to be careful."

The governor said individuals found to be in violation of the No Mask, No Service guidelines will be fined \$50 for the first offense and \$100 for each additional offense.

On the release of federal unemployment benefits for gig workers and the self-employed, Mr. Bryan said only \$34,000 worth of checks had been issued as of Monday, a snail's pace for many self-employed individuals in the territory. One person, who requested anonymity to share details of his situation, told this publication that he was on the brink of being evicted because he hadn't received self-employed benefits made available by the federal government through the local Labor Department, even though he applied since April.

President Trump over the weekend signed a number of executive orders aimed at bringing relief to Americans after talks in Congress between Republicans and Democrats fell apart. One of the executive orders provides \$400 in unemployment benefits — a followup to the \$600 that Americans were receiving through the CARES Act. Local governments will have to pay \$100

while the federal government pays \$300. Mr. Bryan said the administration would meet the \$100 match by tapping into the Unemployment Trust Fund "because it's a cheap borrow."

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