

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bryan Says Declaring State Of Emergency Would Not Solve Crime Problem

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Governor Albert Bryan during a joint Government House-V.I.P.D. press conference on Tuesday said declaring a state of emergency because of the surging gun violence situation in the U.S. Virgin Islands would not solve the crime problem. Instead, the governor expressed concern that such a move would be counterproductive in that it would adversely affect the territory's tourism product -- especially that of St. Croix, which is already weak and is in need of growth.

Mr. Bryan was responding to Senator Kurt Vialet, who [on Friday called on the governor to declare a state of emergency](#) and to immediately initiate a meeting with the Office of the Attorney General, judicial branch and all local and federal law enforcement agencies.

The governor, however, had no appetite for such action, not even in a limited fashion.

"I know there have been cries in the territory talking about declaring a state of emergency. Last week I slipped out to Miami for a day to discuss with cruise [officials] about expanding our tourism product across the territory going forward. Because tourism is the lifeblood of our territory, we have to be careful of about what types of states [of emergency] we declare, especially for our island of St. Croix, who we know have gotten a black eye over the years in terms of crime. Declaring states of emergency does not help in any way; they're just words of where we feel on crime, and does further to damage our product, especially on St. Croix because this is where the recent spate of crime has been concentrated," Mr. Bryan said.

State of emergency declaration gives a government outsize power to take action and to override rules. In case of law enforcement, a state of emergency would allow the V.I.P.D. to perform warrantless searches in residences suspected of harboring illegal firearms, for example.

The last time a state of emergency was declared in the U.S. Virgin Islands in response to violent crime [was in September 2015](#), when warring groups on St. Croix had broken out into open war.

"As the vicious cycle of senseless murders and gun play permeates our territory, I appeal to the residents of this community, who are the parents, relatives, friends, and associates of the victims, to cooperate with and assist police and all law enforcement agencies in their efforts to solve these crimes," Mr. Potter said then.

At the time the, the former lieutenant governor said checkpoints would be erected at various locations around the island. He also made known that all officers had been called to active duty, and would be placed on 12-hour shifts during the state of emergency.

"Since many of these violent crimes seem to be retaliatory in nature, we must, as a community, change the mindset of victims and their associates, who too often take it upon themselves to resolve matters on their own, as if to preserve some code of honor," said Mr. Potter, who at the time was acting governor.