

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bryan, Plaskett, Participate In Insular Areas Meeting In Washington

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Last week at the White House, Acting Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt along with White House Deputy Assistant to the President & Director Douglas Hoelscher, co-hosted territorial governors and members of Congress for the 2019 Senior Plenary Session of the Interagency Group on Insular Areas (IGIA). Among them were USVI Governor Albert Bryan and Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett.

"The IGIA remains an essential platform to amplify territorial issues and concerns by communicating them directly to the White House and Federal agencies," Mr. Bernhardt said. "We appreciated the candid comments by everyone."

Senior federal officials at the IGIA heard from the governors and delegates on a wide range of issues, such as:

- Access to foreign workers;
- The ongoing unmet federal mandates;
- The need for assistance and alternative ways to administer disaster funding;
- The higher cost of rebuilding in the territories following natural disasters;
- The need to expand fishing rights in exclusive economic zone waters; and
- The disparate treatment of territories compared to States in areas such as Medicaid and the federal medical assistance percentage.

According to the release, Ms. Plaskett highlighted several areas for potential increased collaboration and exploration with federal partners in fields such as energy, agriculture, technology, resilience to the changing climate, and transshipment. Territorial leadership all agreed that President Donald Trump and his administration have been very responsive with respect to natural disasters such as Hurricanes Irma and Maria in the Caribbean and Typhoons Mangkhut and Yutu in the Pacific.

“My staff and I are looking at the various issues raised by the Governors to assess where we can make administrative fixes,” said Doug Domenech, Interior’s assistant secretary for Insular and International Affairs. “We will be looking to collaborate closely with our federal partners, and the Congress, in these efforts.”

“I appreciated the opportunity to participate in this important dialogue with governors and other leaders from the insular territories,” said Doug Hoelscher, deputy assistant to the president & director of White House Intergovernmental Affairs. “It was a fruitful conversation that helped highlight opportunities to improve the lives of Americans in the territories.”

Presenters at the 2019 IGIA included the following officials:

- Dr. Robert Kadlec Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- Demetrios Kouzoukas, Principal Deputy Administrator & Director of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- Mark Harvey, Senior Director for Resilience Policy, National Security Council
- Carlos Castillo, Associate Administrator, Office of Resilience, Federal Emergency Management Agency
- Kacey Buder, Senior Analyst, Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission

The Interagency Group on Insular Areas helps to ensure coordination and collaboration among federal agencies in addressing issues of concern to the U.S. territories of Guam, American Samoa, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Mariana Islands, according to the release. Established by Executive Order 13537, the group is co-chaired by the Secretary of the Interior and the White House Deputy Assistant to the President & Director of Intergovernmental Affairs.

Feature Image | From left to right: Guam Governor Guerrero, Guam Delegate Nicolas, American Samoa Delegate Radewagen, CNMI Governor Torres, USVI Delegate

*Plaskett, USVI Governor Bryan, Acting Secretary of the Interior Bernhardt, Deputy Assistant to the President Hoelscher, White House Homeland Security Advisor Fears.
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