

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bryan To Focus On Assuring Federal Funds USVI Receives Are Spent

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ST. THOMAS -- Governor Albert Bryan has said that a major focus of his as federal dollars continue to pour into the territory will be to assure that the government is spending the money. Mr. Bryan's remarks came during a press conference held at the University of the Virgin Islands in St. Thomas, where officials from the U.S. Economic Development Administration, the Virgin Islands Port Authority, along with Mr. Bryan said that \$27 million was awarded to the territory for improvements at the Cyril E. King and Henry E. Rohlsen airports.

"Getting these monies is always good for the Virgin Islands, and today we celebrate a step forward," Mr. Bryan said. "It's a good day, but in the Virgin Islands I think it is

important that we talk about the importance of not only getting the money, but spending the money.

He added, "The EDA has been granting us money for a number of years, some of which we have spent, and some of which we're having more difficulty spending." Mr. Bryan spoke of a \$2 million grant provided to the territory for aquaponics that have not been expended, along with an unnamed amount that Mr. Bryan said was received from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention yet to be used.

"There's over \$259 million from HUD (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development) that we haven't gotten out there yet," the governor said. "So today as I speak before you I'm grateful, but I'm always cognizant that this administration has plenty work to do in making sure that we stabilize the government and make this money get to the people that need it most, our residents, our visitors that come here, so that they can start to enjoy the benefits of some of these federal dollars that have been sitting here for quite sometime."

In a release issued Wednesday, U.S. Department of Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross said the funds -- \$7 million of which will be spent at the Henry E. Rohlsen Airport for the rehabilitation and expansion of the terminal, and \$20 million at the Cyril E. King Airport for the construction of a new parking and transportation center -- are expected to help retain 179 jobs, create up to 158 jobs, and generate \$6.1 million in private investment.

"President Trump promised to be there for the U.S. Virgin Islands after it was devastated by natural disasters in 2017 and the Department of Commerce is proud to be a part of that effort," Mr. Ross said. "These Department of Commerce grants will help rebuild the U.S. Virgin Islands' major airports on St. Thomas and St. Croix, and provide a needed boost to a Tax Cuts and Jobs Act designated Opportunity Zone."

The funds were [first announced by Governor Kenneth Mapp on November 2](#), and was described then as a major boost to the last administration's plan to expand and modernize the territory's airports. The former administration had applied for the competitive grants and was hoping that they would be awarded.

Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett, whose efforts in Washington have played a major role in the territory's approval of post disaster funds, [announced the award on Tuesday](#).

"These two important Economic Development Administration grants are significant to the residents of St. Thomas and St. Croix and the U.S. Virgin Islands because they will allow the USVI Port Authority to continue promoting the wise use of these facilities for the betterment of the U.S. Virgin Islands and its people," she said in the Department of Commerce release. "These grants will also assist the local government and the community in fostering and sustaining sound economic development when it comes to its airports. If we want to restore our aging airports to their former glory—not to mention help them keep up with increasing demand—we must give them the tools to improve and expand their terminals, runways, and taxiways and these two grants will help with that mission."

Breakdown of grants and use:

- \$20 million to construct a Parking and Transportation Center (PTC) at the Cyril E. King Airport on the island of St. Thomas, which is located in a Tax Cuts and Jobs Act designated Opportunity Zone. The project will improve transit access and operational capacity to minimize time required for the transport of people and goods, driving both economic recovery and resilience. According to grantee estimates, the project is expected to help retain 139 jobs, create up to 116 jobs and generate \$5 million in private investment.
- \$7 million to renovate and expand approximately 6,550 square feet inside the Henry E. Rohlsen Airport on the island of St. Croix. This project will improve the structure's ability to withstand powerful tropical weather and will provide a broader resiliency to the island by restoring tourism and import/export opportunities. According to grantee estimates, the project is expected to help retain 40 jobs, create 42 jobs and spur \$1.1 million in private investment.

These projects are funded under the [Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 \(PL 115-123\) \(PDF\)](#), in which Congress appropriated to EDA \$600 million in additional [Economic Adjustment Assistance \(EAA\) Program \(PDF\)](#) funds for disaster relief and recovery as a result of Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, wildfires and other calendar year 2017 natural disasters under the [Stafford Act](#).

Correction: March 7, 2019

A previous version of this article called one of the participating agencies the U.S. Economic Development Authority, when it is the U.S. Economic Development Administration. The story has been updated to reflect the correct information.