

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bryan Maintains Criticism, Says St. Croix Senators Were Pandering For Votes During JFL Meeting

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Governor Albert Bryan maintained that St. Croix senators who held a meeting with Juan F. Luis Hospital employees just over a week ago were pandering. The lawmakers -- Senators Kurt Vialet, Alicia Barnes, Novelle Francis, Javan James and Allison DeGazon -- listened and responded to questions posed by frustrated JFL employees who were angered at how some \$39.5 million in Medicaid reimbursement funds sent to five local medical facilities were set to be spent by the Bryan administration.

Asked during a Consortium interview on Friday whether he believed the senators had legitimate concerns about how the \$39.5 million was being expended, and wanted to respond to their constituents' frustration, Mr. Bryan disagreed.

"Everybody's concerned but this is the Virgin Islands, we make laws for one person," he said.

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The governor continued his chiding, stating that officials must refrain from knee-jerk reactions and instead make the tough decisions.

"It doesn't matter what decision we make, we're going to be able to always assemble 100-200 people who are going to disagree and who are going to be angry about what we do if we act responsibly," Mr. Bryan said in the interview. "What we have to try to do is we have to listen to their concerns, but we have to refrain from making knee-jerk reactions and statements, just saying the right thing because that's what people want to hear and [because] that's what's going to get you reelected."

The governor also said that leaders tend to look at situations in a tunnel-vision manner, where they are only able to see one problem.

"The other thing is we have a tendency to look at problems myopically. So we're looking at Juan Luis [like] that's the only problem that exists," Mr. Bryan told The Consortium. "As governor I have to have a 30,000-foot view. [The] Waste Management [Authority] owes \$20 million, Juan Luis owes \$50 million, WAPA owes \$100 million, Schneider Regional [Medical Center], they probably owe money too. Unemployment insurance, that trust fund \$70 million we owe there, and at the same time we have failing infrastructure in a lot of ways. We have immediate needs for our homes. So when I make decisions I have to make them for the broader community, and there's not a hodgepodge of money. If you take from one place to give to another place, that place suffers. It's not like there's extra money, so when we make decisions and we talk to the public, we have to be respectful, considerate, compassionate, but at the same time we have to make a decision, and that's one thing I'm not going to be afraid to do ever.

Mr. Bryan also said senators had allotted funding for their pet projects from the \$39.5 million while his administration solely focused on the immediate needs of the territory. "None of this money was for the Bryan-Roach slush fund," he said. "The Senate took out two million dollars and they each had their pet project which they could assign money to. No problem. You guys want to get something out of the deal, you want to be able to say in two years when you run, 'I bought this or a paid for this,' that's fine. We didn't take out anything to say the Bryan-Roach team did this, so we took the hit because being financially responsible is something that we're going to do, because no matter what you do somebody's going to be upset."

The governor did set aside \$4.5 million from the \$39.5 million to pay for central government employee raises codified into law under the Mapp administration. This action appeared to have undercut Mr. Bryan's argument that because the reimbursement from Medicaid was not a reoccurring funding source, the senators' plan to allot \$1.1 million from the \$39.5 million for JFL employee raises was ill-informed. Asked how he planned on sustaining the \$4.5 million, Mr. Bryan did not have a clear answer.

"That's why I don't sleep. That's why I'm always on a plane, I'm always going to talk to some economic investor because I don't know," he said.

The governor did promise to address the concerns of JFL employees relative to salary increases. "We have a commitment to the hardworking employees of JFL and all the government employees. We know they work hard; we have to get them paid but at the same time we have to have a priority. Everybody can't get paid at the same time. "

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