

The Virgin Islands Consortium

In 2020 Budget, Bryan Sets Aside \$75 Million To Pay Tax Refunds, Says Government Has 'Changed Course'

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The Bryan administration's Fiscal Year 2020 budget includes \$75 million to pay tax refunds, it was revealed during a cabinet meeting held at Government House on St. Croix Wednesday. At the meeting, Office of Management and Budget Director Designee, Jenifer O'Neal, presented the governor with the budget ahead of the May 30 submission deadline to the Legislature.

"We have changed course," Mr. Bryan said, according to Government House. "But to effectively execute our priorities of driving economic development and improving the quality of life for Virgin Islanders, we need to stabilize our government. Continuing the recovery is part of that process, and that includes making the tough decisions."

To that end, Mr. Bryan thanked cabinet members for their efforts in helping to meet his agenda, including the government's obligation to pay its debts. "One of those debts we need to address is paying income tax refunds to taxpayers in the territory, so the administration is setting aside \$75 million to pay tax returns in this year's budget," the territory's leader said.

As an example of making tough decisions to stabilize the government, the governor pointed to his planned use of the \$39.5 million in Medicaid reimbursements, more than \$20 million of which he intends to pay to the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority as monies owed by the territory's two hospitals. The bill authorizing the use of the funds will be heard during a Committee of the Whole meeting set for June 5, where stakeholders -- including WAPA and the territory's medical facilities -- will be heard before hard decisions are made, according to Senate President Novelle Francis, [who was interviewed by The Consortium Wednesday night](#).

According to Government House, the Fiscal Year 2020 budget contains notable increases to the Department of Health and the Virgin Islands Fire Service for the transfer of Emergency Medical Service Personnel from the Department of Health to the Virgin Islands Fire Service.

The budget also calls for equal distribution of general fund resources to both the Schneider Regional Medical Center and the Gov. Juan F. Luis Hospital at \$22 million, and an increase to the Department of Sports, Parks, and Recreation's budget to provide resource for youth-focused programs.

Territorial ADA Coordinator Julien Henley gave a presentation on the Americans with Disabilities Act and briefed cabinet members on what they need to do to ensure their agencies are in compliance, and their staff is trained, Government House said.

Office of Collective Bargaining Designee, Joss Springette, also provided advice to the cabinet members at Wednesday's meeting on maintaining effective labor relations in their agencies and with their collective bargaining units, the administration made known.

Office of Disaster Recovery Director, Adrienne Williams-Octalien, presented a status update on the recovery and rebuilding effort, Government House said.