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Op-Ed: Trump Administration Committed to Prosperity in the United States Virgin Islands

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In 2017, as a member of the Virgin Islands of the United States Centennial Commission, I had the pleasure of participating in the 100th anniversary celebration of the transfer of administration of the territory from the Danish Government to the United States. Then Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke presented a statement of congratulations from President Trump in ceremonies both in St. Croix and in St. Thomas. It was a memorable day of music, speeches, and celebration.

Today, five territories including the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI), enjoy the benefits of being a part of the U.S. family, including citizenship in the greatest country in the world and protection provided by the U.S. military. More than that, we are a family and, just like any family, when one member suffers, we come to each other's aid.

In response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, President Trump worked with the U.S. Congress and USVI's leadership to direct a historic amount of funding to support response efforts. The President mobilized 42 federal agencies and provided millions of dollars of support to USVI's citizens, healthcare services, government, and schools. Over \$292 million in COVID-19 funds was provided to support the Government of the Virgin Islands through the Department of the Interior's (DOI) Office of Insular Affairs (OIA) and other federal agencies. This funding is being used for COVID-19 preparation and response activities, including the purchase of personal protective equipment and respirators, support for healthcare workers, and improvements to hospitals.

Through a strong partnership, and at the request of Governor Albert Bryan, the President declared a National Emergency for the U.S. Virgin Islands on March 13, 2020, authorizing direct federal assistance for the territory. On April 2nd, 100% funding of the emergency activities provided by the USVI National Guard personnel was authorized. On April 24th, President Trump authorized unprecedented economic relief to the USVI for small businesses, workers, and healthcare providers through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES Act), Families First Coronavirus Response Act, and the Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriation. As part of the CARES Act, OIA provided the USVI with \$7.8 million in support.

In response to hurricanes Irma and Maria, the Trump Administration has provided billions to the U.S. Virgin Islands to assist in its response and recovery from these storms, and build resiliency for future storms. DOI's current Secretary, David Bernhardt, traveled to the territory after the storm to view the damage and rebuilding plans.

The Federal government also provides ongoing, general support to the USVI. OIA has provided over \$20 million in general assistance to the USVI since 2017, including \$9 million in technical assistance support, \$3.6 million for the USVI Office of Disaster Recovery, \$2.3 million in maintenance assistance support, \$2.3 million for OIA Energizing Insular Communities program, \$9.2 million for capital improvements, and almost \$900,000 in Coral Reef and Natural Resources support. These funds have been used for projects to upgrade the government's time and attendance system, create an internet web portal that enables registered businesses to conduct business online, improve federal grants management and usage, resolve multi-generational property ownership issues in the territory, and even to help the Department of Sports, Parks and Recreation (DSPR) purchase a garbage truck, just to name a few.

There are other ways OIA works to support the residents of the USVI. For example, each September we ensure quick and timely transmission of the Rum Excise (cover-over) Tax to the GVI. OIA also provides technical support for special projects like the land exchange between the National Park Service and the USVI Department of Education to build a school for the children of St. John. OIA is also working closely with the DOI Bureau of Reclamation and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to assist the USVI in developing strategies for draught response and water resources management in the territory. We are currently working closely with the Water and Power Authority (WAPA) to develop its Integrated Resources Plan, a Comprehensive Personnel Review Plan, and a Cost of Service Study. All are designed to increase reliability and lower the cost of energy and electricity to residents and businesses.

Finally, OIA has funded Infrastructure projects like the Christiansted Road Rehabilitation Program, the USVI Historic Towns Road Repairs Project, the Frederiksted and Territorial Road Rehabilitation Project, and the Main Street Enhancement Program.

For many years, OIA has organized a meeting in Washington, DC, called the Interagency Group on Insular Areas. Governor Bryan has attended these meetings, held at the White House, organized to afford USVI to bring issues directly to the President's staff and other Federal agencies.

The Trump Administration, together with the Congress, has supported these actions. Why? Because the U.S. Virgin Islands is an important part of the American family.

Submitted on Friday by: *Douglas W. Domenech is Interior's Assistant Secretary for Insular and International Affairs. For more about Interior's Office of Insular Affairs (OIA), visit www.doi.gov/oia, follow @ASIADomenech, or like OIA on [Facebook](#).*

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