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Dept. of Interior Assistant Secretary Domenech Completes Trip to the U.S. Virgin Islands

Business / **Published On November 15, 2019 04:30 AM /**

Staff Consortium **November 15, 2019**

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U.S. Dept. of Interior

U.S. Department of the Interior Assistant Secretary, Insular and International Affairs, Doug Domenech has completed what was described as a recent and productive trip to the U.S. Virgin Islands. Mr. Domenech was traveling with Dwayne Petersen, the Office of Insular Affairs' USVI desk officer.

It was the assistant secretary's sixth trip to the islands since the beginning of the Trump Administration. Last year, Interior's Insular Affairs Office provided \$7 million in grants to the territory and facilitated the \$258 million rum rebate payment to the USVI for 2018 taxes. This trip was a follow-up to Governor Albert Bryan's recent visit with Interior

Secretary David Bernhardt in Washington, D.C.

While on St. Croix, Mr. Domenech met with the following individuals:

- Jacquelyn Heyliger, FEMA Field Office Director, on the status of recovery projects and funding. Over \$6 billion has been allocated to the recovery and over \$2.6 billion has been outlaid. They work closely with the Office of Disaster Recovery (ODR), an office created using 2018 Hurricane Supplemental Funding provided by Congress. The ODR provides critical financial management coordination across each agency and organization receiving disaster recovery funds.
- Larry Kupfer, CEO for the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority (WAPA). Their discussions centered around WAPA's recovery, ways the Department of the Interior (DOI) can continue to be of assistance, and plans to increase the reliability and lower the cost of energy for customers. In 2018, OIA provided \$178,996, to supplement FEMA assistance to repair damages done to the electricity distribution and billing system following Hurricanes Irma and Maria. At the time, nearly 90 percent of electric distribution services across the territory was destroyed. WAPA is now 100 percent online with power distribution in the territory.
- St. Croix Chamber of Commerce Chairman Ryan Nelthorpp of Marshall & Sterling Insurance, and Leon Hughes of NEARiX. They discussed the status of business recovery in St. Croix and ways to work together to build economic development for the island.
- Greg Camacho, Acting Superintendent of National Park sites in St. Croix. They discussed recovery plans and projects at Salt River, Buck Island, and Fort Christiansted.

While in St. Thomas, Mr. Domenech met with the following:

- Commissioner for the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, Jean-Pierre Oriol. They discussed recovery issues, possible funding opportunities from Insular Affairs, and plans for next year's U.S. Coral Reef Task Force meeting.
- Members of the 33rd Legislature where they discussed OIA's work in the territory and elected leaders shared their concerns.
- Lisa Hamilton, President of the USVI Hotel and Tourism Association, to discuss the status of recovery of the hotel sector.

Assistant Secretary Domenech concludes his trip with a stop in Puerto Rico where he will attend the Advisor Council meeting of the Conservation Trust of Puerto Rico (Para la Naturaleza). Domenech represents Interior as a federal partner on the Board.