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Bill From Novelle Francis Seeks to Tax Virgin Islanders for Items Purchased on the Internet

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An Amazon fulfillment center. A bill sponsored by Senator Novelle Francis seeks to levy an internet sales tax on Virgin Islanders. The measure is also supported by Governor Albert Bryan.

A bill sponsored by Senator Novelle Francis seeks to tax Virgin Islanders for items they purchase through the internet, including on platforms such as Amazon, Target, Walmart and other e-commerce businesses. Calls and texts placed to Mr. Francis on Tuesday for comment were not returned.

Governor Albert Bryan threw his support behind the measure in a release issued from Government House Tuesday. The governor said the internet sales tax is part of a broader, unified effort to grow

revenue that includes passing a recreational marijuana law and another push at refinancing the territory's debt after the first attempt was [rejected by the market in September](#). Funds made available through these efforts, Mr. Bryan argued, could be used to help undergird the Government Employees' Retirement System.

"The Remote Sales Tax bill that Senator Francis is proposing is similar to a bill proposed by Governor Bryan and is patterned after an Internet Sales Tax. The Governor and Senators currently are combining the two bills into legislation acceptable to both parties. Revenues from a Remote Sales Tax could be used to pay GERS' unfunded mandate," said the Government House release.

One of the main themes of the internet sales tax bill is that it would encourage Virgin Islanders making purchases online to buy local. The argument, however, does not hold water because many of the items Virgin Islanders purchase online are not available locally. Furthermore, the limited amount of items available locally are in many instances overpriced.

An internet sales tax is not a new idea; most U.S. states [levy such taxes](#) on their residents. And [in 2017](#), the Mapp administration included as part of its five-year economic growth plan an internet sales tax. At the time, then-Finance Commissioner Valdamier Collens said the tax would be 5 percent on items purchased, which he said would have generated about \$3 to \$5 million annually for the government.

The Mapp administration measure was originally part of a "Sin Tax" bill but was removed following swift community backlash. The internet sales tax was never reintroduced because Mr. Mapp lost the 2018 gubernatorial race to Mr. Bryan.