

The Virgin Islands Consortium

'Granny is Getting Old': Bryan Makes Case to Tax Virgin Islanders for Purchases Made Online

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Governor Albert Bryan during his inauguration in January, 2019. By. REEMY-REEMZ PHOTOGRAPHY FOR VI CONSORTIUM

Governor Albert Bryan on Tuesday during his Covid-19 response update took the closing minutes of his event to make a case for why the Virgin Islands government should tax its residents for items they purchase online. The argument follows immediate backlash Senator Novelle Francis fielded [after it was made known](#) by the Consortium Wednesday — first included in a press release from Government House last Tuesday — that the measure was afoot.

In his talk, Mr. Bryan analogized the matter by likening the territory to a house that was built a while back and is in need of repair. That house, he said, is no longer youthful, and is now in fact a "granny."

"We are the ones that live in this house, us Virgin Islanders. And the Legislature, myself and other people, we're like superintendents taking care of the house. The house is getting old now, and everybody's complaining. 'Oh, the house needs to paint, it needs plumbing. The plumbing isn't working. The water... we ran out of water, there's nothing to eat in the fridge, and the driveway... the pothole needs to be fixed.

"Everybody is complaining about all these problems, and everybody wants to make it better. But if we're going to make it better, we're all going to have to chip in a little bit... to buy some food for the fridge, to get the paint, to get somebody to come and clog the pothole that's out in the driveway. To make sure that the plumbing is working, and to make sure... you know, granny is getting old; somebody needs to mind her during the day and make sure she eats something."

To get this done, Mr. Bryan asserted, taxes need to be levied. "But see, this chipping in is called taxes," he said. "It is how our community and communities all over the world improve their infrastructure. No one, including me, wants to pay 'em. But we need to have money for the house. What a dilemma; what are we to do?"

The governor then explained the process of law-making, stating to Virgin Islanders what is already widely known: that a bill must be heard in the Senate before it becomes law. He then falsely asserted that Virgin Islanders did not read the bill because it was not yet available.

"It is amazing that people in the community are objecting to Senator [Novelle] Francis's bill for the Remote Sales Tax, when no one has read the bill. Do you want to know how I know no one has read the bill? Because the bill is not available for reading. Because it's being worked on in the process to get it out," the governor said.

Senator Novelle Francis himself provided the legislation to the public, and the [bill](#) has been on the Consortium since Wednesday.

Mr. Bryan then addressed certain aspects of the bill that speaks to the would-be law's implementation. Among them, the \$108,000 sales threshold set by the bill, meaning a company would need to have sales of or exceeding \$108,000 in the USVI to be taxed under the proposed measure.

"There are a lot of things that have to be discussed before we can actually put it out as a law, and that is why you have a hearing," Mr. Bryan said. He then said Virgin Islanders build the economies of other jurisdictions when they either shop online or travel to the mainland.

"Now more than ever purchases are increasing online and really wiping out local businesses.... We have to level the playing field and not only build our economy through taxes, but allow for our local businesses to compete, and for you to [make] that choice and say, you know what, I'm going to buy local."

"Surely if we pay to build their community when we go to the states and shop, we should be a little willing to pay a little bit to build ours," he added.

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