

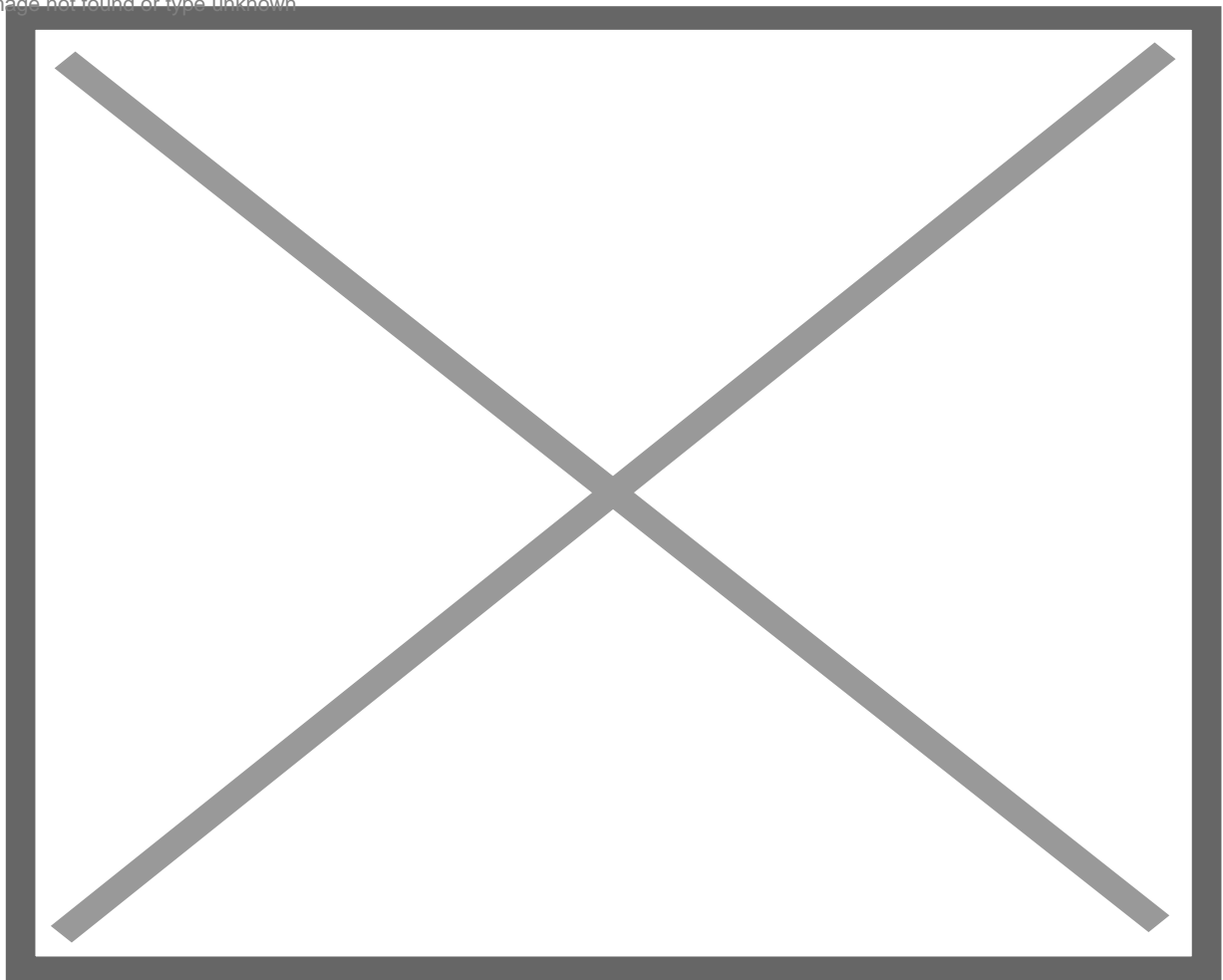
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Trump Signs Covid-19 Aid Bill; Virgin Islanders to Receive Stimulus Payments 'Quick,' Governor Bryan Says

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Ernice Gilbert **December 28, 2020**

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President Trump late Sunday signed the \$2.3 trillion Covid-19 aid and government spending bill into law after opposing the measure last week, paving the way for Americans — including Virgin Islanders — to receive direct coronavirus-induced stimulus payments.

For Americans on the mainland, the payments are expected to come within days. For Virgin Islanders, Governor Albert Bryan told the Consortium last week that the funds are expected to arrive in the USVI within weeks, and that his administration — with lessons learned from the first round of Covid-19 stimulus payments — will release the monies to residents swiftly.

"This time it's going to be rapidamente," Mr. Bryan said, using the Spanish word for quickly. "It's going to go out quick."

The funds will be distributed locally by the Bureau of Internal Revenue. B.I.R. [had faced](#) criticism after it took several months for Virgin Islanders to receive payments from the first round of stimulus funding approved back in March.

The \$900 billion in Covid-19 relief funding includes \$300 a week in enhanced unemployment insurance through March 14, funding for small businesses, schools, health care providers, among other relief measures. The agreement also extends two additional unemployment programs through April 4.

Additionally, the latest measure includes funding for rental assistance and vaccine distribution.

Relative to direct payments to Americans (including Virgin Islanders), the amount is \$600 per adult and \$600 per child. The stimulus payments phase out for individuals making \$75,000 annually, and \$150,000 for couples.

The funding provides \$277 billion for small businesses through the Paycheck Protection Program, which is the bulk of the \$325 billion funding allocated to small businesses as part of the package. Elsewhere in the agreement, \$15 billion goes toward airline payroll support.

The compromise between Republicans and Democrats takes into consideration the continued surge in virus cases and deaths, which has caused additional business closures and unemployment to increase. But the bill was threatened following strong opposition from Mr. Trump, contending that the \$600 being provided to Americans was measly, and that Congress should instead provide Americans with \$2,000 per adult in aid.

The House, controlled by Democrats, has planned a vote for such a measure on Monday, though the Senate's thinking on the matter was not clear, with Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell expected to speak on the president's request Monday.

"I thank the President for signing this relief into law, along with full-year government funding legislation," said Mr. McConnell in a statement. "His leadership has prevented a government shutdown at a time when our nation could not have afforded one."

Mr. Trump also opposed some provisions of the \$1.4 trillion government funding bill, which he said includes wasteful spending on foreign assistance.

The president had sought the rollback of Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, contending that social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter were using the section to suppress conservative voices. It was unclear as to whether lawmakers would attempt a roll back, and whether there was enough support on Capitol Hill to achieve the president's desire.

Social media platforms have been flagging Mr. Trump's posts, especially on his claims of election fraud. Attorney General William Barr has said the Justice Department has not uncovered fraud on a scale that would affect the outcome of the 2020 General Election.