The Virgin Islands Consortium

Gittens, Serving as the Senate's Liaison to the White House, Calls on Biden to Pause USVI SBA Disaster Loan Payments

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Senator Kenneth Gittens, who serves as the 34th Legislature's Liaison to the White House, has requested that President Joe Biden extend the pause on payments for Virgin Islanders with Small Business Administration Disaster Loans given that the territory remains in a state of recovery from the devastating 2017 hurricane season.

Mr. Gittens said thousands of Virgin Islands home and business owners have active disaster loans with the SBA as a result of Hurricanes Irma and Maria. The senator made the request to the White House following Mr. Biden's announcement about continuing the deferment on federal student loans. He reminded the nation’s chief executive that the Virgin Islands was just “embarking on our slow return to normalcy” when faced with the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic has been particularly devastating to the territory’s economy given our dependence on tourism, he noted.

“While we have done a pretty good job of addressing some impacts of Covid-19 here in the Virgin Islands, there is no way to account for the total loss of the cruise ship industry and the fact that many of our largest resorts remain closed,” Mr. Gittens said.

He pointed out that Hurricanes Irma and Maria were two of the largest and strongest Atlantic storms in recorded history.

“Small businesses and homeowners remain deeply appreciative of the opportunity for federal aid, however, nearly all of this direct assistance came to our citizens in the form of SBA loans,” the senator wrote in his letter to Mr. Biden. “Given our already fragile economic state prior to the pandemic, we were truly grateful for the temporary reprieve granted by the SBA in terms of payment. Unfortunately, many homeowners are still struggling to rebuild and businesses to reopen. An opportunity to defer payments on these loans would grant Virgin Islanders the breathing room required during this most challenging period.”