

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bryan Administration to Allow Media Back at Gov't House Starting Monday After Almost a Year

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Government House, St. Croix

After almost a year of being barred from attending in-person Covid-19 press briefings citing the pandemic as the culprit, the Bryan administration has decided to allow media back to Gov't House.

That's according to Richard Motta, Gov't House communications director. Speaking to the Consortium Wednesday, Mr. Motta said media would be allowed to return beginning today, though strict protocols must be followed, and media personnel must RSVP.

"We are going to be allowing the media back into Gov't House starting on Monday," he said. Mr. Motta said Covid-19 protocols for the press will include temperature screening, among other measures. "We need people to RSVP because we have to give security notice ahead of time," he added.

The Consortium in an Editorial Board opinion in April of 2020 titled, "It's Time to Allow the Media Back at Government House", called on the administration to allow media to make in-person appearances. At the time, the administration was struggling to get its call-in system right, and media personnel would oftentimes be bounced off calls, or fail to get through during a critical time of the pandemic, when information was desperately needed and pertinent questions needed to be asked.

Here are excerpts from the [April 28, 2020 opinion](#):

"Relative to the social distancing argument, it was understandable in the early stages of the pandemic, when things were developing fast and action had to be taken. But now that information on the disease's spread is widely available, protocols to help minimize infection are also well known.

"Looking at leaders on the U.S. mainland — more pointedly in the two most visible instances of President Donald Trump and Governor Andrew Cuomo — the media has been present, with strict social distancing protocols being adhered to. Media reps sit in chairs, each six feet apart and asks questions. Some setups even see media reps being tested for high fever.

"There are only a few reporters in the U.S. Virgin Islands who attend these events, and the Government House ballroom on St. Croix, where the current call-in setup is being staged, is wide enough to facilitate adequate social distancing.

"This administration, when it was just a campaign, had lauded openness as a principle that would be at the foundation of its tenure. Mr. Bryan even said his administration would be so open that residents would get sick of it.

"In good faith, then, Mr. Bryan, go the extra mile and consider the press — who represent the people — and make accommodation for social distancing. You can even keep your call-in line active, but this open-ended lockout of media from the house of the people of the Virgin Islands is unacceptable."