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Covid-19 Variants' Arrival to USVI is 'Inevitable,' Dept. of Health Says as State of Emergency is Extended to May 7

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Lawmakers voted Thursday to extend the Covid-19 related state of emergency declaration to May 7.

Dept. of Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion spoke of the importance of the extension, stating that the pandemic continues to impact the territory.

“It is critical for the USVI to maintain an active state of emergency status," she said. "It is essential that the Government of the Virgin Islands deploy accompanying emergency authorities and maintain access to federal benefits and assistance that arise from the emergency status.”

Ms. Encarnacion added that the state of emergency "will need to be extended further as the pandemic will not be over shortly." When asked what would be the biggest consequence of not extending the state of emergency, she said the financial fallout would hurt the territory.

D.O.H. Territorial Epidemiologist, Dr. Esther Ellis, pointed to the variants of Covid-19 that have been affecting various parts of the world and the U.S. She said while variants have not been detected in the U.S. Virgin Islands, their arrival to the territory's shores was "inevitable."

Senator Marvin Blyden favored the extension for the federal support provided to Virgin Islanders in a variety of areas, among them rent and mortgage assistance, the federal moratorium on evictions, support for frontline workers and other forms of aide made available by the federal government.

Senator Kenneth Gittens said he would introduce an amendment to adjust how consistently the Senate would have to extend the state of emergency. The amendment would also increase to 90 days the length of the declaration.

Lawmakers complimented the Dept. of Health for its efforts during the pandemic, and urged the community to get vaccinated.