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Bryan Calls for More Financial Support From Federal Government During Virtual Testimony in U.S. House Committee

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USVI Governor Albert Bryan testified virtually in the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources on Wednesday, March 24, 2021. By. US HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES VIDEO FEED

Governor Albert Bryan took advantage of his opportunity to speak before the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources virtually on Wednesday to express to lawmakers what he said were roadblocks to the territory's recovery, among them the lack of financial support from the federal government, Mr. Bryan said, which he stated has held back American territories' development.

“The funds that we got through the American Rescue Plan will go a long way toward helping our Territory recover, as well as for all of the territories,” Governor Bryan said, according to Government House. “But a major continuing problem is our financial inability to maintain our roadways, our power plants and all the infrastructure, to train our workforce and to constantly adapt to these ever-changing threats. ”

He added, “Securing our infrastructure under the ‘Build Back Better’ plan will be crucial for the territories in order for us to be able to build back. We hope that the Biden Administration continues to support us and help us develop comprehensive plans that address resilience.”

The governor is said to have told committee members that the biggest help and the biggest hinderance to the territories having the ability to be on par with the mainland states has been the federal government.

“Restrictions between FEMA and HUD have created impossible hurdles to rebuilding. They simply have to understand that we cannot wait 10 years to build back,” he said. “A quick fix to help us with our financial obligations would be for this body to back the full debt of the territories. This would give us the ability to borrow money at the 1 percent that is being issued today and would free up millions of dollars of capital that we now pay in interest.”

Mr. Bryan also spoke about the USVI's efforts amid the pandemic to return the economy to pre-pandemic levels. Additionally, he cited the marine sector and highlighted the territory's strategy to maintain charter vessels and dredging the harbors in Charlotte Amalie and St. Croix, as a specific economic sector that could benefit greatly from President Joe Biden's “Build Back Better” plan, part of which [was unveiled in recent days](#).

“We remain optimistic that the Administration and Congress will support our territorial leadership. Not just the Virgin Islands, but all of us,” Mr. said. “The ‘Build Back Better’ plan represents an opportunity to liberate the Virgin Islands – and all of our territories – from fiscal distress and build a sustainable local economy that can withstand periodic natural and economic disaster.

“It is also an opportunity to invest in our people. As we recently celebrated our 100th anniversary of being an American territory, you can ensure that we are prepared for the next 100 years, strengthening our infrastructure and eliminating federal policies that undermine our ability to attract investment that will give us a fighting chance to make our second century as Americans better than the first.”