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Bryan Shoots Down 'Bubble Environment' Scenario for Cruise Passengers Come July, Says St. Croix Expected to See More Ships

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Cruise Ship in Frederiksted in 2019. By. THE VIRGIN ISLANDS CONSORTIUM

With cruise ships [all but certain](#) to start sailing again in July, Governor Albert Bryan, who chairs the V.I. Public Finance Authority board by virtue of his position, along with West Indian Company (WICO) Interim CEO and President Anthony Ottley, on Wednesday at a board meeting discussed two scenarios for the territory: a bubble environment, which Mr. Ottley said would stifle the economic impact of returning cruise ships, and an open setup that would see vaccinated travelers being allowed to enjoy their visit normally.

Mr. Bryan shot down the idea of a bubble environment. "We are not doing the bubble thing, that's for sure," he said. His adamancy followed Mr. Ottley's explanation on why a bubble scenario would be negative.

Their comments were in response to PFA board member Keith O'Neal's question, who asked whether arriving passengers on the vessels would be subject to a bubble scenario.

A decision was "still up on the air," said Mr. Ottley, who stated that cruise ship partners had yet to decide a final outcome. "A lot of that hinges on the rate of transmission in the particular destination, so being that we pretty much hover between 1 and 2 percent here with Covid infections among the populous, we are in a good position for that to be something that is possibly not required," he said.

A bubble environment would limit cruise ship passengers to ship-sponsored tours, thereby diminishing the economic impact as only certain taxi operators would benefit, said Mr. Ottley. The WICO interim CEO said he would update the P.F.A., the Governor's Office and Department of Health once more information is available.

Mr. Ottley went further into detail on the possible impacts of the bubble. "It is definitely going to have less revenues for the wide expanse of the public here in St. Thomas or St. Croix, because if we do have that bubble scenario you don't have those passengers who like to just come out and walk down main street or who like to jump on a bike and pedal across town, or who wants to go on the beach and get away from all the cruise ship passengers. If you have the bubble scenario then you will be relegated to staying in your group, hence only a certain amount of taxis would be able to capitalize on the passengers being here and that is something we definitely don't want to have."

He added, "It will definitely be an economic hit to us if it is required that we do the bubbles, but for all intensive purposes, what I've gotten from our cruise partners is as we go down the road, the infection rate becomes lower, the ships are requiring everyone to be vaccinated, it is more and more likely that bubble concept if and when it is enacted probably wouldn't be for too long."

Asked whether cruise ship passengers would have to upload Covid-19 test results into a portal similar to travel passengers, Mr. Bryan stated, "From my estimations and the conversations that I've been having, everyone that is going to be on the ship is going to be vaccinated, so if everyone on the ship is vaccinated there will be no need for a bubble. The only people that won't be vaccinated are children."

He added, "We are looking forward to tourists being able to go where they need to go and then get back on the ship because everyone is fully vaccinated. That is not the final statement but that is the way I am positioned right now and those are the conversations I'll be having as we get closer to July 9th."

On a positive note for the island of St. Croix, most cruise ships plan on utilizing American ports as opposed to other island destinations, according to Mr. Bryan. He said there are proposals from cruise lines to utilize both U.S.V.I. ports on their voyages.