

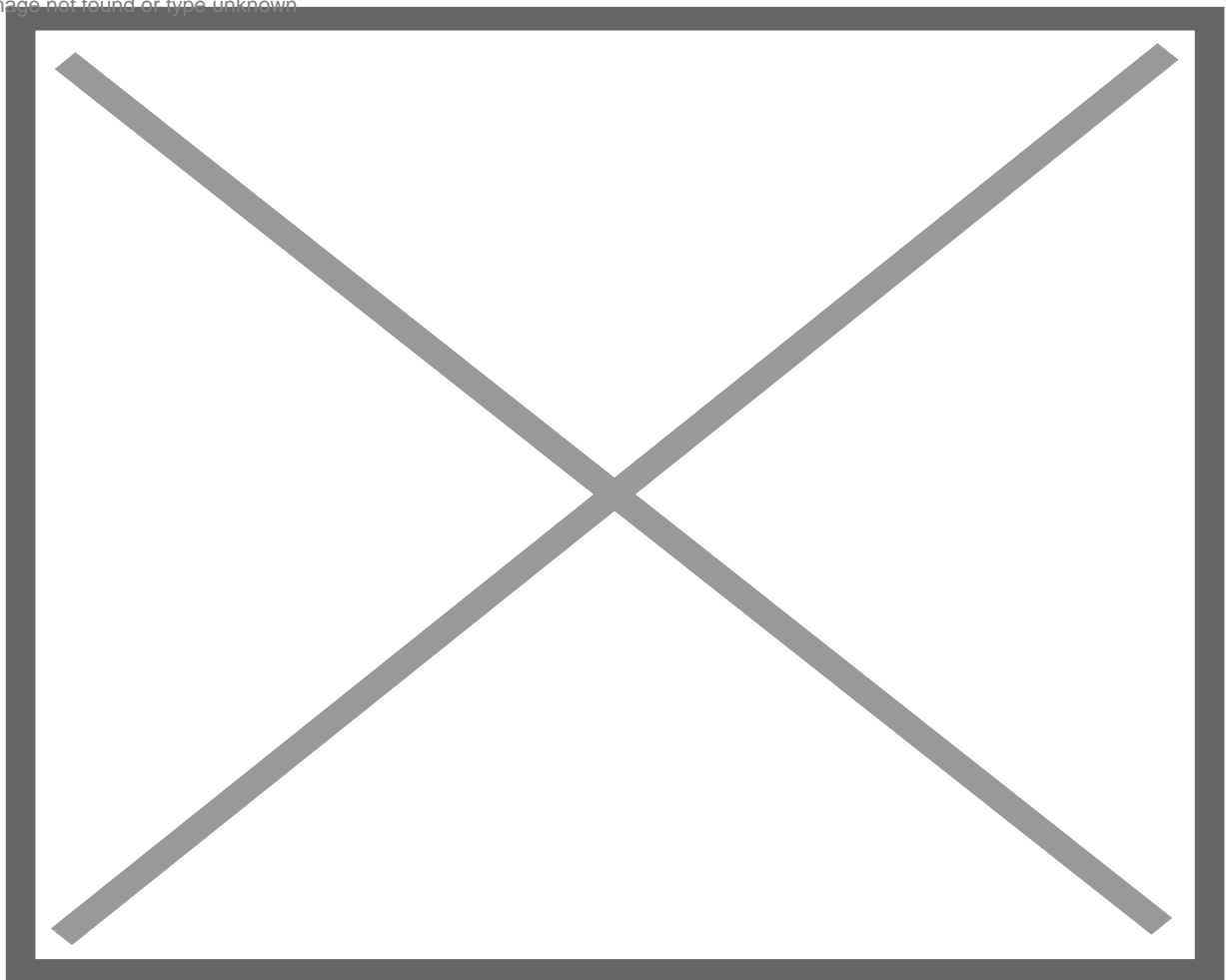
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'I Almost Died Because of Corona': Senators Make Plea to the Unvaccinated as Steven Payne Recalls Near-Death Experience And Senator's Brother Dies From Covid

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Kyle Murphy **August 04, 2021**

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Senator Steven Payne, who revealed that he almost died from Covid-19, encouraged Virgin Islanders during a Tuesday Senate session to get vaccinated. By. VI LEGISLATURE

Senators passionately urged the community to get vaccinated during a legislative session Tuesday just one day after Governor Albert Bryan reported that the territory had seen a pandemic-high of 29 hospitalizations.

Senator Steven Payne, who contracted Covid-19 in March, used most of his time during the first block of the day to detail his battle with the virus and how his lifestyle is still affected to this day. The senator said he plans on visiting a doctor later this month to determine the toll the virus took on his lungs.

"Before March 8, 2021 I was a strong advocate against being vaccinated, I figured I was extremely healthy. I ate right, I did all the right things so if I was to contract corona I'd be fine... We are now in August. I still don't have the strength I had before March 8... I almost died because of corona," he said.

Mr. Payne said he still can't snorkel, an activity he used to enjoy three to four times a week, and still feels the effects of the virus in his joints.

The senator stressed, "I know it's a matter of choice but I'm asking everyone who can see me or hear me today, please, please, please go and visit with your healthcare provider and decide which vaccine is right for you and get vaccinated... take it from a knucklehead, take it from a hardhead and get yourself vaccinated. If not for you, for your loved ones."

Senator Milton Potter, whose brother was the [latest victim to die from Covid in St. Thomas](#), was excused from the hearing. He expressed to Senate President Donna Frett-Gregory through a letter the pain of losing a loved one. The 68-year-old man was also the brother of former Lieutenant Governor Osbert Potter.

Senator Kurt Violet was another lawmaker who used most of his time in the first block of the day to address the recent surge. "Whether you're vaccinated or not vaccinated, wear your mask as much as possible, especially when you are speaking to someone... practice social distancing...we cannot continue to act like everything is back to normal."

He added, "Those who are on the fence, I personally encourage vaccinations. For those who don't want to be vaccinated, you really need to be cautious. You can't act as if you're vaccinated or act like nothing is going to happen to you if you are out all over the place."

Mr. Violet said he has submitted "serious legislation" in reference to individuals who know they are positive and are not quarantining. He shared a story where a person confirmed to another person that they had tested positive for Covid-19, and five minutes later this person went to Wendy's.

"It's very selfish if you know you are positive to go out in this community and risk spreading that virus to someone whose system is in jeopardy," he said.

Senator Marvin Blyden urged caution from individuals "especially when you know something is wrong with you not to go around other individuals like you don't have no care."

Senator Novelle Francis explained he got vaccinated because "as a leader I wanted to lead from the front." He added, "I want to strongly encourage those individuals that are the fence, maybe having second thoughts about taking the vaccine, please do yourself as well as your family and your community a favor by considering taking the vaccine..."

Because of [cross-contamination at the Juan F. Luis Hospital](#), Senator Kenneth Gittens encouraged using the Regional Training Institute at the National Guard headquarters on St. Croix as a Covid-19 acute care facility. "This [was put in place](#) whenever there is a surge that they actually go over there and we are to get assistance from the Department of Defense... we need to realize that we

have a problem and start to request these personnel again," he said.

Senator Dwayne Degraff, who said he was ridiculed as he looked "like a spaceman" in the Senate chambers with Covid protective care during the nascent days of the virus, said he was happy to see an attitude change.

"I remember when I walked in here in March of 2020 looking like a spaceman with a mask and gloves on and I was laughed at. But again that's how serious I took it back then and I continue to take serious now, and I'm happy to see as an institution we put things in place to safeguard the lives of our employees, our friends, our neighbors," he said.

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