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Delegation of USVI Leaders Travel to Colorado For Marijuana Summit Ahead of Potential Legalization in Territory

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Facility for cannabis cultivation under indoor lights with colorful green leafy buds on tall branches By. GETTY IMAGES

Twelve senators, Governor Albert Bryan and members of his executive branch, members of the V.I. Cannabis Board, V.I. Dept. of Tourism officials, representatives of the Office of Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett and other government officials will head to Colorado for a V.I. Cannabis Summit that starts on Monday, as local leaders set the stage for a debate on the legalization of marijuana in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The summit is being led and was organized by Senate President Donna Frett-Gregory, who spoke to the Consortium Wednesday on why the weeklong event is of immense importance. For one, it serves to impart indelible knowledge on the cannabis industry to local leaders as debate at home is expected to start soon. And it's happening in Colorado — among the first states to legalize recreational marijuana and an example of a successfully regulated [multi-billion market](#).

Senator Janelle Sarauw holds the bill that is expected to be heard. Elements of her measure and that of Governor Bryan are expected to be meshed when hearings commence. [An attempt](#) to wrest control of the bill from Ms. Sarauw in December 2019 and move Mr. Bryan's measure narrowly failed. Ms. Frett-Gregory said it is time to move forward.

"There was a commitment that was made that we would move this legislation the first quarter in 2021, and of course we're now in the last quarter of 2021. It didn't happen," the Senate president said. Ms. Frett-Gregory said that since summer she's been working with the National Council of State Legislators (NCSL) on the possibility of educating leadership in the USVI on the benefits of a properly regulated marijuana industry.

"As elected leaders I think that it is important that we get true insight on what does real legalization of adult use of cannabis would mean for the Virgin Islands," she said. The conversations eventually led to what is now the V.I. Cannabis Summit, which runs from Monday, Oct. 25 through Thursday, Oct. 28, and will be held at the NCSL headquarters.

Ms. Frett-Gregory said the summit's agenda is loaded with important meetings, signaling that those in attendance will be on a serious learning mission and not a boondoggle. She said she pondered the event for a while, well aware that it may garner criticism from wary community members. Nonetheless, the senator saw it as important enough to move forward. "At some point this is going to come anyway, and as a leader sometimes you just have to fall on the sword and do what's right so people could be well informed," she said.

The full agenda is [here](#). For a day and a half leaders will be in sessions with industry experts, said Ms. Frett-Gregory. Another full day and a half will include visiting small and medium cannabis grow operations, processing centers and dispensaries, among other cannabis-related businesses.

"This will give us good insight on what's going to really be required of us," said the Senate president. "Because I think people think that — and don't misunderstand what I'm saying when I say this — I think that we think this industry is light. This is a huge responsibility that we are contemplating to take on. So I think what's important for us is if we're going to look at this from an earnest perspective, we need to do it from informed lenses."

Leaders are expected to leave the territory between Saturday and Sunday for the event.