

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bryan Admits Penalizing Businesses For Patrons' Flouting of Protocols is Unfair, But Adds Strategy Has Helped Slow Spread of Covid-19

Coronavirus / **Published On November 03, 2021 03:50 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **November 03, 2021**



Governor Albert Bryan on Tuesday admitted that the current strategy of penalizing establishments when patrons flout Covid-19 protocols is unfair to businesses. The governor, however, said the strategy has helped to slow the spread of the disease in the territory, an indication that there would be little change in the Covid-19 Task Force's enforcement policy.

Responding to questions from the Consortium, Mr. Bryan said, "From the time we started this we already advised business owners that they are responsible for making sure that

they operate within safe parameters and tell their patrons, which I would be the first to say is a little unfair to owners."

He said when the Covid-19 Task Force is dispatched to enforce protocols, they are encouraged to work with businesses. However, if those officers believe public health is endangered by the establishment, according to the governor's executive orders, the Task Force can shut down a place of business.

"We always tell the Covid Task Force their job is not to shut down businesses, their job is to keep people safe. So if the officers are in a situation where they feel it's endangering public health, then they have a right to shut down that business based on the executive orders and decree mandated by my office."

A Consortium reporter likened the issue to stopping a bus from running because someone on the bus decides not to wear a mask. Or ordering a store shut because someone committed a crime in the store.

Mr. Bryan responded, "I will be the first to say and I already admitted that it isn't fair. But you can't argue with the fact that it's been a year and a half and we've done extremely well with Covid using these parameters."

He added, "The next thing I would say is if people are coming into your nightclub and snorting cocaine on the tables or rolling up and bagging up weed at the table, or going into your kitchen and violating your health protocols in terms of the food you're serving; or behind your bar for that instance — it's all up to the business owner. The business owner is in control of that establishment. Most of these places say 'we have the right to refuse entry into the establishment.' They're in control. It's not the best-case scenario and yes, we wish that we could go out and give every single person a violation for the mask but resources are what they are. And the one thing that no one can argue with is that the protocols that we have put forth have proved fruitful for us."

The matter came to the fore following Mr. Bryan's [easing of restrictions for entertainment venues](#) and [controversial enforcement actions](#) taken thereafter by the task force.

The governor last week announced that dancing would be allowed, removed the time curfew and permitted establishments to close on the hour indicated on their license. He also removed the 11:00 p.m. moratorium on the sale of alcohol.

Mr. Bryan also raised the limit to 250 as the number of people who can attend an event, be it entertainment, faith event or otherwise. He later clarified that those persons must be vaccinated, and that the establishment owner must receive approval from the V.I. Dept. of Health before moving forward. The health commissioner may also approve larger gatherings at her discretion, said the governor. "If there's going to be a mix of people in there, the usual 100-person restrictions are still in place," he said.