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Bryan Vetoes Bill Eliminating Requirement for 400-Capacity Banquet Hall at Caravelle Hotel; Vialet Says Veto Will Lead to Job Losses and May Affect Racetrack

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Caravelle Hotel in Christiansted, St. Croix By. GOTOSTCROIX.COM

Governor Albert Bryan on Monday vetoed a bill sponsored by Senator Kurt Vialet that sought to remove the requirement for the casino at Caravelle Hotel in Christiansted, owned by VIGL, to build a 400-capacity banquet hall, with Mr. Bryan criticizing the measure as a special-interest piece of legislation that did not go through the hearing process.

"I vetoed it because it's a special-interest bill and what it would have done is it would have meant that nobody who wants to have a casino downtown would have to build anything," Mr. Bryan told the Consortium. "I don't have a problem giving them an ease on the 400 capacity, but when they

wanted to build the casino in Christiansted that's what they said they were going to do. That was one of the main reasons for having the casino, so I vetoed it."

Mr. Bryan said he included in his veto message that while he believes in the casino in Christiansted, "they can't not build the 400-room banquet hall and then not do nothing at all. They have to give us something in return — maybe even move it from 400 to 200," the governor said.

Senator Kurt Vialet sponsored the measure which was special-ordered to the Senate floor during a November session. He criticized the governor's decision, contending that it would hurt jobs on St. Croix, and said VIGL held on to all of its employees during the Covid-19 pandemic even as it remained closed. Mr. Vialet also said the Casino Control Commission had rejected a plan presented by VIGL that would have been implemented in lieu of the banquet hall.

"This is an effort to retain an entity that kept their employees employed despite being closed as a result of Covid-19," Mr. Vialet said. "They have revitalized Christiansted with their development and sponsors of community events. They have 96 employees, many who receive health and insurance benefits. Why would we issue penalties during a pandemic for a 400-room banquet facility? They submitted a plan but it was rejected by the CCC."

He added, "After the closure of Limetree and October being one of our lowest months for income tax collections on St. Croix, we are willing to sacrifice jobs. That decision is irresponsible and not in the best interest of St. Croix," Mr. Vialet said.

He said the VIGL plan to serve in lieu of the 400-seat banquet hall would see the atrium and the upstairs space above the pool at the Caravelle Hotel, including the pool area being utilized. Those spaces have hosted "a couple hundred people during shows," said Mr. Vialet.

Also at risk, Mr. Vialet added, is the development of the racetrack on St. Croix "because you need a casino license to run a racino." He explained that the license may be affected if the penalties tied to building the 400-capacity banquet hall are not paid and construction is not completed by May. "If you look at the footprint, there is no room to expand," Mr. Vialet said. "They tried to buy the parking lot between Rum Runners and Holger Banske, but that fell through."