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Senators Say Bryan's Speech Was Heavy on Achievements, Short on Solutions to Challenges. 'He Gave Us a Federal Report,' Violet Says.

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Senate President Donna Frett-Gregory during Governor Albert Bryan's fourth State of the Territory Address on Jan. 24, 2022. By. THE V.I. LEGISLATURE

Senators who make up the 34th Legislature said Governor Albert Bryan's fourth and final State of the Territory Address on Monday ahead of his reelection bid was heavy on what he has achieved, and light on providing solutions to challenges facing the territory.

“I think the governor spoke a lot about his achievements, about the way forward for the territory but he was very short on discussing or sharing with the people of the Virgin Islands his strategy as it relates to the challenges that we are faced with here in the Virgin Islands,” said Senate President

Donna Frett-Gregory in an interview following the address.

"I thought that I could have heard more about where we were going with education, our healthcare system; we have issues within our Department of Human Services. So we did not hear those things and I thought that in that particular area, those areas the speech was lacking," she said.

Despite her concerns, Ms. Frett-Gregory was hopeful that the Legislature and the Governor's Office could work together in the best interest of the territory. "We look forward to continuing to work with the governor because his speech was high on collaboration and I look forward to collaborating with him along with my colleagues so we can truly work on improving the lives of Virgin Islanders," she said.

Senate Vice President Novelle Francis said that from his observation, the speech was weak on the challenges facing the territory. "He is upbeat, he spoke a lot about his success stories, but I thought that he was a little bit light on some of the challenges the territory is experiencing. I am hoping to hear from him how he intends to deal with the challenges that confront us," he said.

Senator Janelle Sarauw said the speech focused on Covid-related items, and she questioned whether other responsibilities were being neglected.

"Everything cannot be Covid, and a lot of it was based on the pandemic," Ms. Sarauw said. She said D.O.H. has a lot of other responsibilities that also must be managed. The same with the Bureau of Internal Revenue. "The success of IRB cannot be predicated solely on how many stimulus checks were given out. A lot of it was focused on the pandemic, but agencies have a lot more that they are mandated to do by statute, and we've seem to have forgotten that."

Senator Kurt Vialet stated, "My impression was that he gave us a federal report. He gave us a report of the utilization of Covid funds, the utilization of the American Rescue Plan Act, disaster recovery, but it didn't touch a lot in terms of the use or the development of additional funding that will go toward the government of the Virgin Islands. It was a lot of federal discussion."

Senator Kenneth Gittens said the speech was upbeat, but he was concerned about the completion of St. Croix capital projects and the lack of any mention of the [promised stipends for essential workers](#).

All senators spoke in the post-interview following the address which was filled with achievements and announcements of new initiatives. Senator Carla Joseph believes that more focus should have been placed on agriculture.

"I thought he was very vivacious in his delivery...but I heard nothing about agriculture," she said. "For me, agriculture is one of the major platforms, but it was so silent. I was surprised because he mentioned in his 20/40 plan that that was something he has as a number one," she said.

Senator Franklin Johnson stated, "The governor was very upbeat, but I feel that there was a lot left out. One thing that brought great concern to me is that thing about population growth. Our population will continue decreasing if our healthcare is not in better condition for the elderly population that we have here."

"People are continuing to leave the territory because of healthcare," Mr. Johnson added. "He did not even discuss the Bureau of Corrections, the area that I came from. The people in blue who work there are going through a hard time in that place and not to mention the prisoners who are in

that bad condition. It is very serious and those are the things that I wanted to hear about."

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