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Benefiting From Ban on Russian Fuel Imports, Limetree Bay is Already Hiring and Could Start Oil Production By Year's End, Officials Tell Governor

Business / **Published On March 14, 2022 06:00 AM /**

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Limetree Bay logo at headquarters on St. Croix. By. ERNICE GILBERT/ V.I. CONSORTIUM

The recent ban on Russian fuel imports to the United States which took immediate effect when announced by President Joe Biden last Tuesday, is having a positive outcome for at least one company in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The new owners of the Limetree Bay Refinery have told Governor Albert Bryan that the company has started rehiring laid-off employees, and that its regulatory process with the Environmental Protection Agency was making progress.

"This is really good for the refinery and their startup because the U.S. went to Venezuela to talk to them about their crude, and our refinery was built to [process Venezuelan] crude so they're in a very good position now," Governor Bryan told the Consortium during an interview on Sunday.

The Biden administration last week held meetings with the Venezuelans as the president sought to regain access to the country's oil following the ban on Russian energy products. The outreach, however, [was met with stiff bipartisan opposition](#), with lawmakers contending that the U.S. should not entertain any such business with the autocratic regime without first restoring Democracy there.

"Biden is easing off his strict energy policy which allows the EPA to be a little bit more lenient, because right now he is in a pickle," Mr. Bryan said. "He's looking for answers as well."

The governor said West Indies Petroleum and Port Hamilton Refining and Transportation, the new owners of the Limetree Bay Refinery, have indicated that work was moving along in a satisfactory manner.

"They have already started hiring people so that's a good sign, too," Mr. Bryan said. "They're looking to do other recruitment in terms of finding other people who were working at the refinery and getting them back, so that's good news on their side."

He added, "They're still waiting for some final stuff from the EPA and the U.S. Dept. of Justice, but [things] seem to be moving along. These moves happening here are bad for WAPA but definitely good for the refinery. So there is a silver lining to this." The governor is considering declaring [an energy state of emergency](#) tied to the Water and Power Authority as energy costs soar.

Mr. Bryan said he has always looked for opportunities during crises, "and that's one of them," referring to the positive developments at Limetree Bay.

Relative to the restart of oil refining, the territory's leader stated, "They're saying they're hoping to be pumping oil before the end of the year. I am not altogether optimistic about that, but regardless, what that means is they're going to have to be up to full employment by at least the end of the summer. They didn't say that, but that's what they would have to do if they're serious and that would be good for St. Croix, really good for St. Croix."