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JAG-VI Earns Jobs for America's Graduates’ Highest National Performance Award for Helping Young People Succeed in School, Work and Post-Secondary Education

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UVI's 2017 commencement ceremony. By. VI CONSORTIUM

Because the economy of the U.S. Virgin Islands is almost entirely dependent on tourism, the multiple impacts from the pandemic and two destructive hurricanes almost brought it to a halt.

Yet, despite all the economic, social, education, and employment damage from those combined disasters and the resulting challenges, the Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) program in the Virgin Islands (JAG-VI) has been a smashing success. So successful, in fact, that it earned Jobs

for America's Graduates' 5-of-5 National Performance Award.

It was my great honor to present the 5-of-5 Award to Governor Bryan, Lieutenant Governor Roach, and the Commissioners of Education and Labor at Government House recently, with 40 current students and successful alumni of JAG-VI present. I also had the opportunity to visit Ivanna Eudora Kean High School and spend some time with the Principal, Assistant Principals, St. Thomas District Superintendent, Commissioners of Education and Labor, and more than 30 JAG-VI students, who told me firsthand about the great value they have found in the program.

The results tell the story:

A graduation rate of 94%, while the nation's overall graduation rate was 84%. graduation rate.

Most of JAG-VI's young people who wanted to work were employed, and they had the highest full-time employment rate anywhere in JAG's 39state network – 98%.

The postsecondary education rate was 55% – also one of the highest rates in the network – while across the rest of the nation, postsecondary enrollment rate decreased by 1015%.

These results were achieved due to the longtime enthusiastic support of Governor Albert Bryan, the priority the Commissioners of Education and Labor and the Principals of all four high schools in the Islands have placed on the program, the inspiring work of JAG-VI's Job Specialists, and the hard work of JAG-VI's students.

JAG-VI was re-launched in its current form by then-Commissioner of Labor Albert Bryan nine years ago. Now, because of the success he has seen firsthand, Governor Bryan has committed to doubling the scale of the program and bringing its great story of success to hundreds more young Virgin Islanders. In light of his leadership and commitment to the program in the Virgin Islands, the Board of Directors of Jobs for America's Graduates has invited Governor Bryan to become the next Vice Chair of the National Board to help lead JAG's future growth and success. Important to note is that 14 Governors serve on JAG's Board of Directors – more Governors than serve on any other board in the country.

Some 19,000 companies across the country – including companies in the Virgin Islands – regularly hire JAG's young people. Mastery of JAG's 37 Employability Competencies are central to the classroom curriculum. Employers report that they like to hire JAG students because they show up for work on time, are ready to work and learn more, and are focused on providing great customer service.

In short, the Virgin Islands has something truly special in JAG-VI. The program has been proven to work at scale on the mainland, and has achieved truly remarkable success in the Islands while facing some of the most daunting challenges of any part of the nation. The great news is that there are opportunities to bring this success story to many more young people in the Islands. Jobs for America's Graduates stands ready to help in any way it can.

Congratulations to all of you who have been a part of the success of JAG-VI!

Opinion submitted on Monday, Sept. 19, 2022 by: Ken Smith, president, Jobs for America's Graduates