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Bryan and Wheatley Discuss Easier Custom Procedures For Citizens, Free Wifi For BVI Residents Using USVI Fiber Network

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BVI Premier Natalio Wheatley addresses Governor Bryan during the Ninth Annual Inter Virgin Islands Council. By. GOV'T HOUSE

In their first official duty-related meeting in the USVI since BVI Premier Natalio Wheatley took office, Governor Albert Bryan and Mr. Wheatley took on a number of issues, including customs procedures affecting citizens of both the U.S. and British Virgin Islands, and matters related to improving inter-territory commerce.

The discussions were held during the territories' Ninth Annual Inter Virgin Islands Council, which was the first meeting between the two governments since 2020. The event was held at Gov't

House in St. Thomas on Thursday morning, and was followed by a press event where the two spoke on matters explored during the meeting. Also part of the gathering were BVI Deputy Premier Kye Rymer and other members of the cabinet, and on the USVI side Lt. Governor Tregenza Roach among other administration officials.

Discussions also included ways to use the USVI fiber-optic network to assist the BVI in setting up free Wi-Fi hot spots for residents.

According to Gov't House, Mr. Wheatley went off-script with a brief anecdote about going to school on St. Thomas, living in Estate Thomas as a child and how his brothers bagged groceries at Grand Union before ending his opening remarks with a call for unity between the two island territories.

“It’s just an example that you are us, and we are you. We are one Virgin Islands people,” the BVI premier said. “The task before us is to be able to maximize the areas of mutual benefit and really honestly and truly confront those few areas where we have areas of conflict. I believe we can do it.”

Items discussed include the following:

- Passes to bypass customs procedures for USVI residents to attend festivals in the BVI.
- Pre-clearance of U.S. Customs for visitors landing on St. Thomas on the way to the BVI.
- A reciprocal agreement to streamline business license requirements for day charters and water taxis to operate between territories.
- Reciprocal agreements regarding commercial and recreational fishing licensing and requirements.
- Cooperative efforts by both territories to streamline the overnight charter market.

Governor Bryan also said he had given the BVI delegation a letter naming Department of Consumer Affairs Commissioner Richard Evangelista as the Consul General to the BVI on behalf of the USVI.

In his closing remarks, Mr. Bryan expressed his hope that by working together, the USVI and BVI could maximize the benefits of their combined tourism assets and in so doing, enhance the experiences of thousands of tourists who visit both territories every season.

“A lot of things can be done. It all starts with communication and I think the communication that was started here today in terms of maximizing the total benefit of our tourism product is key,” he said. “There are a lot of things coming up in the British Virgin Islands that Virgin Islanders want to go to, and we want to make sure we expand what that means for them. People from all over the world are interested in the food festivals and music festivals and all the other things that go on in the British Virgin Islands.

“Here in the U.S. Virgin Islands, we, too, want to expand our season from not only November to May, but year-long. That’s something we can work on together, extending benefits of not only the U.S. Virgin Islands, but also in the British Virgin Islands,” the Governor said. “I think a key topic of this meeting today was digitizing and the internet. Technology will allow us to do things that we’ve never been able to do before. Ease access in terms of business. Ease access in terms of

recreation. And ease access in terms of our people meeting and greeting and having a great time in the Greater Virgin Islands.”

Also attending the meeting on behalf of the U.S. Virgin Islands was Customs and Border Protection Port Director for the Virgin Islands Todd Bellew; U.S. Coast Guard Lt. Commander Jan League; and Virgin Islands Professional Charter Association Executive Director Oriel Blake, according to Gov't House.

The Inter Virgin Islands Council was started by Governor Charles W. Turnbull, and the first meeting of the IVIC took place on St. Croix in 2004.

Governor Bryan adjourned the meeting with a motion to hold the next IVIC meeting in the BVI, with a date to be determined.

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