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Upbeat Governor Bryan Calls USVI 'Tough, but Beautiful' Place to Live During Wide-Ranging Interview

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Governor Albert Bryan shakes hands with Sen. Javan James at the Earl B. Ottley Legislature on Jan. 23, 2023 during Mr. Bryan's 5th State of the Territory Address. By. GOV'T HOUSE

During Thursday night's live broadcast, a genial Governor Albert Bryan Jr. joined Consortium publisher Ernice Gilbert to expand on the themes presented in his 5th State of the Territory address, delivered at the beginning of this week.

The governor began by once again reiterating a now-familiar message; that his final term in office will be focused on delivering improved prospects to the people of the Virgin Islands.

“You can’t be a strong nation with a 30 percent poverty rate,” Mr. Bryan declared. “You can’t be a strong nation unless individuals get strong.” For that to happen, the governor opined, each person has to “choose to seize a destiny of prosperity.”

The first question posed was about the recent firing of the Attorney General. Governor Bryan confirmed the Consortium’s reporting that the underlying reason for Denise George’s summary dismissal was a trend of a lack of communication. He said that when she took the job, Ms. George knew the parameters. Mr. Bryan would never discuss criminal matters with his attorney general, but when it came to civil litigation, he expected to be kept updated.

After the USVI finally reached a settlement with the estate of Jeffrey Epstein, the governor was relieved. Noting that the legal wrangling had “dragged out on minutiae,” Mr. Bryan was happy to put the matter behind him. “I am really sick and tired of our islands being associated with Jeffrey Epstein,” the Governor told Mr. Gilbert.

Mr. Bryan was then dismayed to “read in the paper we’re suing JP Morgan, an institution that we’re trying to, at the same time, establish relations with.”

The governor had praise for the former Attorney General’s legal mind. “Denise is a fantastic attorney, and she defended us in a variety of ways.”

As to who would replace her, Mr. Bryan was non-committal. There were “some good prospects” that were being considered, the governor said. He was similarly vague when asked about changes to the rest of his cabinet, only saying that by March, “we’ll be done with all the changes we want to do.”

The wide-ranging interview touched on crime, specifically surveillance cameras. Noting the cameras around “the majority of the major road intersections,” Governor Bryan further claimed that the trade of purse-snatching on the Christiansted Boardwalk had been “eliminated” by solar-powered cameras. He also pointed to police “spy cameras”, which have led to at least two arrests of suspected drug dealers.

Overall, “the police have really geared up in terms of technology...and it’s paying results,” the governor assessed, citing reduced numbers of homicides, gun crimes and other serious criminal activity.

Other topics of discussion included healthcare — once again the governor shied away from providing a firm date when asked about the opening of the JFL North facility, but re-committed to having it commissioned no later than March 31st.

After a question about finances, Governor Bryan admitted to only having a few days of cash on hand for the government. “4-5 days,” he said, “but it’s not a real number.” Mr. Bryan said that annual “budget makeup from ARPA” funds to the tune of between \$50 and \$60 million would soon be released “which will put us where we need to be.”

The pair touched on economic matters, discussing in some detail the labor shortage that will be heightened by an impending ramping up of major construction projects, and how in turn that shortage is constraining the pace at which the territory is able to develop.

Mr. Bryan once again outlined a plan to “fix WAPA” by removing the yoke of the VITOL contract from around the neck of the Water & Power Authority, thereby freeing the utility company to take some cost-saving actions that are expected to translate into lower energy bills for

consumers.

However, he also reminded the public that there had not been a hike on electricity rates despite 20 percent inflation over the past three years. “People always cry about WAPA,” Mr. Bryan remarked, while highlighting that the current government subsidy to the agency came about only due to the Ukraine war which broke out in 2022.

The governor spoke about power generation at the refinery being able to supplement WAPA’s efforts. About refinery operations in general, Mr. Bryan remained optimistic, but left room for the possibility that restart efforts would ultimately fail. “If the oil refinery can’t start, we want to make use of the tremendous resources they have in there,” Governor Bryan said, referring to not only the 100 MW power plant on site, but the concrete plant, landfill and machine shop as well.

Notwithstanding, the governor said his, and the owners, preferred outcome is to have a functional refinery, and are working “every day” to bring this goal to fruition.

Governor Bryan and Mr. Gilbert also touched on tourism and education. He made a point of speaking warmly about his defeated opponent in the Gubernatorial election, Kurt Vialet. With Mr. Vialet no longer a member of the Legislature, Mr. Bryan speculated about what contribution he would make next to USVI society. “I don’t want to see him leave,” the governor mused, saying that the highly competent former educator had a lot to offer the territory.

As the interview began to wrap up, Mr. Bryan reflected on what his legacy will be — something he admitted he did not think about much when he first took office. “When I get depressed, I drive around and look at projects,” the governor disclosed, saying that what really drove him was not the edifices but the impact those completed works would have on the lives of Virgin Islanders. Hundreds of residents would have, by the time Mr. Bryan leaves office, benefited from programs like [VI Slice](#), the [GVI Fellowship Initiative](#), and the like. These are the types of things he would be proud to recount to his grandchildren as his accomplishments, the governor said.

He then returned to his initial message from the start of the interview — that of people choosing to elevate themselves. His administration would do everything they could to continue to support the populace, but individuals had to seek out and make use of the opportunities available to improve their station in life. He urged listeners to start taking steps now to better position themselves, cautioning that cost of living was only going to rise year on year.

He closed by expressing hope that his efforts through his two terms in office would ultimately result in a territory that young Virgin Islanders would choose to remain in — to live, work and play. “It’s a hard place to live but it’s a beautiful place to live,” Governor Bryan said about his home.