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'Consider the Options That Are Before Us' - Bryan Urging St. Johnians to Support Land Swap Deal for School

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Governor Albert Bryan, Jr.

During the groundbreaking ceremony for the Arthur A. Richards pre-K to 8 school reconstruction project on Thursday in St. Croix, Governor Albert Bryan exhorted the people of St. John not to let the opportunity for a similar project on their island fall by the wayside. “When I hear what’s going on in St. John with people protesting about the land swap and the school — you got to remember, we’ve been talking about that for 20 years,” he said.

The proposed land swap is between the Government of the Virgin Islands and the National Parks Service (NPS), to facilitate the construction of a school on St. John. The NPS would transfer

ownership of the 11 acres of land identified for the construction project, currently part of the V.I. National Park to the government. In exchange, GVI would cede the 18-acre Whistling Cay.

The public comment period for the proposed deal has been open since last March, and was extended just ahead of the deadline to accommodate more feedback, until March 15th, 2023. In a recent public meeting on the issue jointly hosted by Congressional Delegate Stacey Plaskett and territorial Senator-at-Large Angel Bolques, some attendees expressed reservations about the proposal, grouching about the local government having to give up land it owns to a federal agency.

On Thursday, Governor Bryan struck a pragmatic tone. "I don't like the fact that we have to swap out land with the National Park. Who likes that? But guess what, it's either do that now or do nothing at all." Noting that this was the only viable path to building a school on St. John before the government at this time, Mr. Bryan said, "We have to consider the options that are before us...we can't consider options that are not before us."

Earlier this week, Senator Bolques [told the Consortium](#), "I don't think in this day and age that our children need to continue with this kind of historical activity — moving over to St. Thomas, waking up [at] 5 in the morning to catch the 6 o'clock boat to get to school for 7:30, 8 O'clock. You know, it's disenfranchising our young people," speaking from his perspective as a St. Johnian schoolboy who himself had to undertake the daily ferry trip to get to school and back.

As he stood at the podium towards the end of the groundbreaking ceremony for a brand new school on St. Croix, Governor Bryan also exhorted the people of St. John not to stand in the way of their chance to relieve the island's children of that burden. He urged them to seize the opportunity now, otherwise "40 years from now when this new school is falling apart, we still won't have one on St. John."