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Some in BVI Criticize Governor Bryan's Impassioned Endorsement of BVI Political Party, Saying Move Could Damage Longstanding Relationship

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Governor Albert Bryan, Jr. By. REEMY-REEMZ PHOTOGRAPHY/VICONSORTIUM

As election fever grows in the British Virgin Islands, Governor of the U.S. Virgin Islands Albert Bryan Jr. is receiving sharp criticism from some for his decision to weigh in on BVI politics.

Mr. Bryan recently visited his BVI neighbors where he endorsed the campaign of the Virgin Islands Party, which won the last election and served as the ruling administration until the arrest of former party leader and BVI Premier Andrew Fahie on drug trafficking, money laundering, and racketeering charges last year.

Following Mr. Fahie's arrest and removal as premier, the VIP administration was dissolved in favor of a Unity government, in the face of the threat of losing democracy in the BVI to temporary direct rule from the UK. The threat came after a scathing Commission of Inquiry Report found deep issues with governance, including potential corruption in almost every aspect of public administration in the territory. To stave it off, the Unity government, which comprised members of Parliament from both sides of the aisle, took the helm with Premier Dr. Natalio Wheatley at the head.

However, even prior to the dissolution of Parliament the territory's political parties had resumed their partisan activities, which were thrown into high gear once the Unity government had officially come to an end and the members had returned to their various factional homes.

Kye Rymer's campaign, launched 10 days ago is where Governor Bryan had been invited to speak. The incumbent in District 5 served as the deputy premier in the Unity government administrations and as minister for Communications and Works in both the Unity and VIP administrations.

Back on the VIP ticket as he seeks to be re-elected as the representative for BVI's 5th District, Mr. Rhymer and the rest of the VIP were endorsed by Governor Bryan, who said that these "tough men and women" were who should lead British Virgin Islanders in the next administration.

"With every scintilla in my body I'm going to help these brothers and sisters fight, you hear what I'm telling you," Mr. Bryan told the gathering at the rally.

His comments drew strong reactions from political candidates in other parties. Myron Walwyn, the National Democratic Party leader who is seeking election in the 6th District, suggested that Mr. Bryan's endorsement was a strategic move to ensure that the USVI maintained its competitive advantage over their British neighbors. "If I was him, I would endorse them too! Because if they can't get the job done, it's more business for him across the waters. He's quite right," Mr. Walywn told supporters at his own campaign event. "I would want them to stay forever."

Meanwhile, local commentator Claide Skelton Cline, whose own ties with the VIP government led by Fahie have been scrutinized, specifically the provenance of several contracts he was awarded for work the Auditor General found did not provide value for the money that was spent, added his own critique of Governor Bryan's decision to endorse one of the four parties contesting April 28th election in the BVI.

"Why would he inject himself in the local campaign politics?" Skelton Cline asked on his "Honestly Speaking" radio program. He asserted that this was an unprecedented occurrence, either for a governor of the USVI to endorse a candidate or party in the BVI, or the BVI chief minister or premier to do the same in the USVI.

The commentator wondered about the quality of advice Governor Bryan was receiving from those close to him. "Did anyone in the United States Virgin Islands, around the governor's camp, didn't you all see anything wrong with this, anything unethical about this, anything unwise about this?" He also questioned why the Virgin Islands Party would accept or allow Mr. Bryan to issue such an endorsement.

Skelton Cline argued that Governor Bryan's move may be damaging to the relationship between the two territories, especially if a party other than the one he endorsed ends up with a Parliamentary majority following the election. "We share an annual Friendship Day...no matter who the government here is...why would you come to Tortola and endorse a candidate and/or a

particular party? That's not right from any corner, any quarters."

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