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Governor Bryan Discusses Rapid Tourism Growth and Workforce Limitations at VIHTA Meeting

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Governor Bryan and Tourism Commissioner Joe Boschulte (center) spoke with attendees prior to the V.I. Hotel and Tourism Association's annual meeting on Tuesday, April 11, at the Ritz Carlton St. Thomas. By. GOV'T HOUSE

Governor Albert Bryan on Tuesday addressed the USVI Hotel & Tourism Association (VIHTA) at their annual meeting at the Ritz Carlton St. Thomas, where he emphasized that the territory's tourism infrastructure is growing and improving so rapidly that it is outstripping the workforce's capacity to handle the numerous projects aimed at enhancing visitors' experiences.

According to a release from Government House, the governor highlighted a series of tourism-related projects in various stages of completion, including the 3P project for private stakeholders

to upgrade and manage both of the territory's airports, improvements to the U.S. Customs process, and the renovation of bathrooms at the ferry dock on St. John. The governor also mentioned the upcoming Phase 2 of the St. Thomas Waterfront Revitalization project and the renovation of the Fort on Water Island.

An estimated \$150-\$200 million is allocated for the redevelopment of Crown Bay, including the addition of another cruise ship pier. Governor Bryan also announced that 700 more hotel rooms are expected to open on St. Thomas and St. John in the next two years, with estimated revenue from hotel tax at \$36 million in 2023 and \$38 million in 2024.

The territory's leader pointed out the USVI's significant workforce and housing issues, which pose challenges to attracting and retaining the workers needed for the tourism sector's numerous projects. He urged VIHTA members to collaborate with the government to address these issues and improve vocational training for local businesses.

The governor assured VIHTA members that the government is committed to helping with workforce development and training resources, emphasizing that "quantity is good, but quality is better."

"If you need training resources or workforce development resources, the government is here to help," Governor Bryan said. "We will figure out a way to get you that workforce development money that you need because it is so important."