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Time for Action: In Editorial, Bryan Calls on Senate to Approve Land Swap for State-of-the-Art School on St. John

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Render of propose Sprauve pre K-12 school. By. GOVERNMENT HOUSE, U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

Good Day Virgin Islanders,

In our four years in office, and with your support, the Bryan-Roach Administration has resolved many decades-old challenges confronting our Virgin Islands community.

We have fixed our failing public pension system, returned hard-earned dollars owed to Virgin Islands families through payment of retroactive wages and income tax refunds, provided affordable homeownership opportunities for Virgin Islanders, and continued addressing long-

ignored infrastructure projects. We hosted weekly press briefings from Government House to keep you informed throughout the pandemic and since.

Challenges remain, but we have an unprecedented opportunity to resolve a problem that has vexed our community for half a century: Constructing a new public Pre-Kindergarten through twelfth-grade school on the island of St. John.



Whistling Cay, St. Jon. (Credit: Government of the U.S. Virgin Islands)

I recently sent legislation to the 35th Legislature to approve a land swap agreement between the Government of the Virgin Islands and the National Park Service that, if approved, will allow us to build a new state-of-the-art PK-12 public school in a central location in St. John that will put an end to the hardships of St. Johnian students who have to commute to St. Thomas to attend school.

There have been a lot of debates and discussions in the 50 years it took for us to get to this point.

Some of that discussion has been about the National Park Service giving the land outright to the USVI for a St. John school.

While I would wish for nothing less, that has never been an option. And our children in St. John and their families should not have to wait so many more decades for us to continue to debate and discuss this improbability.

I have had conversations with many St. John students and their parents. I have heard the stories of their daily commute, some leaving home in the darkness as early as 5:30 am to make the ferry, sometimes in stormy weather, to get to school in St. Thomas on time. Many students have to pass up participating in extracurricular activities because of the rigors of that commute.

We now have an agreement with the National Park Service to swap the land on Whistling Cay for 11 acres in Estate Catherineberg, where we can immediately begin constructing a new school, community center, and storm shelter. We also have the commitment of the federal government to fund the construction of that new state-of-the-art facility.

Under our proposed legislation, the Virgin Islands Government and its people will retain the water rights to Whistling Cay.

The time for action is now.

Say yes to the land swap, call your senators, and tell them St. John students deserve better. Like their peers throughout the territory, they should have their own school on their island. The opportunity to build it is right in our grasp.

Submitted on Wednesday, June 28, 2023 by:
Albert Bryan Jr., Governor United States Virgin Islands

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