



STATE *of the* TERRITORY ADDRESS

GOVERNOR ALBERT BRYAN JR.
JANUARY 28, 2019

EARLE B. OTTLEY LEGISLATIVE CHAMBERS
CHARLOTTE AMALIE, UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

2019 STATE *of the* TERRITORY ADDRESS

~

GOVERNOR ALBERT BRYAN JR.

~

MONDAY, JANUARY 28, 2019

EARLE B. OTTLEY LEGISLATIVE CHAMBERS

CHARLOTTE AMALIE, UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

Reverend Clergy, Senate President Kenneth Gittens and members of the 33rd Legislature, Lt. Governor Tregenza A. Roach, Esq., Delegate to Congress Stacey E. Plaskett, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands the Honorable Rhys Hodge and Honorable Justices of the Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands, Presiding Judge Michael C. Dunston and Honorable Judges of the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands, Chief Judge of the District Court of the Virgin Islands Wilma A. Lewis and the Honorable Judges of the District Court, The Honorable Gretchen Shappert, U.S. Attorney for the District of the Virgin Islands, members of the Cabinet and other Agency heads, invited guests, and my fellow Virgin Islanders; Good Evening.

Congratulations Senate President Gittens on assuming the leadership of this esteemed body and congratulations to the members of the Thirty Third Legislature on your election last November.

The people of our community have entrusted you with the responsibility of ensuring the public good and improving the quality of life for all Virgin Islanders. I look forward to capitalizing on the historic opportunities we have as co-equal branches of government to work together in setting the course for a brighter Virgin Islands. I pledge the support of our administration in working with you toward that goal.

Thank you to our servicemen and women of our Virgin Islands Army and Air National Guard, as well as our Virgin Islanders serving in Active Duty across the globe. Your selfless sacrifice to serve the nation and our community is appreciated and does not go unnoticed.

I also acknowledge the efforts of our first responders, who work tirelessly around the clock to ensure our public safety. I extend my sincere thanks to each of them for their continued support and their truly remarkable efforts in the immediate aftermath of the storms and in the hurricane recovery effort.

Tonight, for the first time I appear before you as Governor of the Virgin Islands of the United States to report on the State of the Territory, as mandated in the Revised Organic Act of 1954.

Two months ago, the people of the Virgin Islands elected to change the course on which the territory was heading. They recognized that while our Virgin Islands had made progress in the post-hurricane recovery and rebuilding efforts, there remained much work to realize the quality of life to which we all aspire.

Lieutenant Governor Roach and I heeded that clarion call for change and have been hard at work since our election in November and throughout the transition.

We have been analyzing the critical areas in our government which need improvement, as well as those areas that are working well and need to be expanded upon.

We owe a debt of gratitude to each of the Bryan-Roach campaign volunteers and to the transition team members who volunteered their valuable time to assist in the transfer from one administration to the other.

Their analysis and insight have proven to be immeasurably beneficial. And I'd like to take this opportunity to thank them once again.

We have been equally diligent at building a cabinet with dynamic and innovative agents of change who are motivated and ready to work on behalf of the people of the Virgin Islands.

The individuals we have named thus far are prepared to tackle the complex challenges confronting our various government departments and agencies, and we thank them for agreeing to this critical public service.

We recognize the important responsibility with which these leaders are charged. That is why we have been dutiful in our selections and why we will continue unabated to vet properly and to ultimately nominate the right people for the job.

Tonight, as I begin now my fourth week in office, I must report that the state of our territory is distressed.

However, "every adversity carries with it a seed of equal or more significant benefit." So the territory continues to strive toward progress. For the darkest hour comes before the dawn. And the dawn of a brighter Virgin Islands for us all is the immediate mandate of the Bryan Roach administration.

Without question, the catastrophic storms of 2017 dealt us a crippling setback. But our territory has been successful in salvaging opportunity in the midst of crisis.

Through a collaborative effort that included the 32nd Legislature, our Delegate to Congress, Stacey E. Plaskett, then-governor Kenneth E. Mapp, the nonprofit community, and private sector partners, the Virgin Islands has potentially secured billions in federal grants and loans to support the post-hurricane recovery and rebuilding effort.

And the territory was given broad discretion to utilize those funds, to make needed improvements that will not only support resiliency but also support critical economic development and long-needed infrastructure improvements.

In the course of the recent federal shutdown, however, there were assertions by the President of the United States that he might declare a National Emergency and use unapplied Disaster Recovery Funds for Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and several states to pay for the construction of a southern border wall.

It would be a terrible injustice if our country's leaders in Washington redirected federal resources marked for the rebuilding effort in the U.S. Virgin Islands for any other purpose but to rebuild our territory.

This assertion has been set aside for now. But we must be vigilant and prepared to meet this challenge if it arises. I am fully committed to ensuring that efforts to improve the U.S. border security do not in any way jeopardize our ongoing recovery and rebuilding process and will work with Delegate Plaskett to keep the Congress and the Administration to their obligation.

We recognize the recovery is far from over. And we also understand that we must be methodical, prudent and strategic in how we use the federal dollars appropriated to assist us in the rebuild.

You can rest assured that this is the intent of our administration.

We've also seen a glimmer of progress through the economic benefit realized from the efforts to restart refinery operations at Limetree Bay. It is comforting to see once again the presence of refinery workers patronizing our businesses on St. Croix.

Likewise, the territory has also benefitted from the presence of recovery workers and other outside contractors. This economic stimulus has been timely and is surely welcomed.

But even with the progress in the recovery and the promise of new refinery operations, we are

confronted with the truth that our territory is still very much mired in a financial and economic crisis.

I understood this truth when I sought this office, and I stand here before you as the Chief Executive of these Great Virgin Islands, ready to guide us through the canyon of challenges ahead.

Before leaving office, the outgoing administration briefed us on the precarious fiscal situation of our government. They revealed to us that the longstanding fiscal problems that plagued our government before the 2017 hurricanes have yet to be resolved.

General fund revenues fell drastically after the storms creating severe cashflow shortages for the Government of the Virgin Islands. Hurricanes Irma and Maria only increased the burden of what was an already growing structural budget deficit.

To put the true state of our territory's financial status into perspective; the Government of the Virgin Islands could not have met its day-to-day expenses over the past 12 months if not for the availability of FEMA community disaster loans.

We have borrowed \$212 million, and unfortunately, we can't borrow any more.

To compound our problems, the Government of the Virgin Islands currently has no access to the capital markets. With minimal cash reserves on hand and no access to additional credit, government expenditures must be funded by ongoing revenue collections on a pay-as-you-go basis.

Our Government has accumulated nearly \$270 million in outstanding obligations to vendors, and unpaid income taxes to the people of the Virgin Islands. It also owes an additional \$150 Million in the unpaid employer contributions to the GERS. This does not include the debt of the semiautonomous agencies.

None of which can be immediately paid in full.

Additional stressors on our budget include the passage of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 which threaten to reduce income tax collection rates to the Virgin Islands Government by approximately 24 percent or \$65 million annually. The current court injunction in excise tax collections places in jeopardy an additional \$40 million in tax revenue collections.

As a government, we must honor the commitments made to the people, our vendors, and our partners. This commitment comes at a cost.

Every single agency of our government is feeling this strain. But our hospitals, Waste Management Authority and the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority are perhaps the most vulnerable.

For the fiscal year 2019, the Governor Juan F. Luis Hospital forecasts it will operate at a monthly cash loss of \$1.5 million. The Roy L. Schneider Regional Medical Center also anticipates monthly operating losses of \$1.2 million. These forecasts do not include the over \$10 million each hospital owes to WAPA nor the more than \$50 million debt amassed by the healthcare facilities before the hurricanes.

A report from the previous administration indicates that for at least the last five years, the Government of the Virgin Islands' expense obligations has exceeded operating revenues, resulting in annual structural deficits ranging anywhere from \$200 to \$450 million.

Adopted budgets were typically balanced with unrealistic revenue forecasts that eventually fell short of those projections without making a corresponding reduction in expenditures.

While our government pretended that budgets were balanced in theory and in budget books, when looking through the lens of generally accepted accounting principles, the structural deficits persisted.

Our government managed these deficits largely by underfunding required pension payments, deferring vendor payments and income tax refunds, and borrowing short-term — further compounding the situation.

The federal recovery dollars have masked the true weakness of our economy.

While the disaster recovery spending will cushion the blow in the near term, if left unattended, the instability of the economy will become increasingly more evident when the recovery efforts subside over the coming years. The window to restart our private-sector economy to avert fiscal collapse is very small, and it is closing rapidly.

This is why we had to change course and change course now.

The Lieutenant Governor and I campaigned on a strategic approach to tackling these very issues, but our first area of focus must be to stabilize the government and to restore the trust of the people.

There are going to be tough decisions in the months and years ahead. But if the members of this body are willing to exercise the necessary political will, I assure you that I will stand beside you in making those tough decisions. That means we have to be conservative with our budgeting and certain government expenditures will have to be cut.

Stabilizing our government will also require shoring up our public pension system. No economy or community can be stable with a pension system in jeopardy that directly affects almost 20 percent of its population and indirectly more than 50 percent.

Previous administrations were only able to contribute to the Government Employee Retirement System one-third what was actuarially required to keep the system solvent.

The Government of the Virgin Islands has underfunded the pension system and contributed to an unfunded liability of \$5 billion.

The Government Employees Retirement System has been a talking point in State of the Territory addresses for the last 20 years. It is time for the rubber to meet the road. My first official meeting as Governor of the Virgin Islands was with the GERS board, and we have begun the work of securing dedicated revenue sources to pay down the unfunded liability.

The system is contemplating the sale of its assets to maintain liquidity and cut losses. But we cannot allow our GERS to be divested of assets, without a plan to ensure the long-term security of the pensions of the hardworking public employees.

Reducing the pension benefit for existing retirees is not a viable option for solving this crisis.

We are proposing a restructuring of the existing plan that will preserve retirement benefits for future generations because simply kicking the can down the road will not suffice. As we are all aware, if the executive branch, the legislative branch, and the board of trustees don't act immediately the system will defunct in less than four years, and that's the best case scenario.

Simply put, we are out of road.

Stabilizing our Government must also include improving our struggling healthcare system. Our territory has a majority aging population, and persistent problems of obesity, hypertension, heart disease, and diabetes.

These are issues that are crippling our people and our government's ability to administer and pay for healthcare services.

Last week, I signed the Virgin Islands Medicinal Cannabis Care Act into law. I did this primarily because it was the right thing to do for our Virgin Islanders suffering from autoimmune and other debilitating medical conditions.

But I know there are serious concerns among many in our community with what could be the unintended consequences. I take those concerns seriously, and our administration will work to ensure this industry is appropriately regulated and is working to put in place the regulatory requirements and establish the registry board as mandated by law.

We must also pay attention to ensure we realize the full economic benefit from this industry, and so we will be proposing amendments to the law, as necessary, to achieve both purposes.

As we repair Schneider Regional Medical Center and rebuild Juan F Luis Hospital and Myrah Keating Community Health Center, our approach to solving these problems must be comprehensive and inclusive of all the needs of our people.

We are pursuing a health strategy that not only captures the needs of our people but allows for the expansion of our capabilities as the economy grows. And grow it will. That expansion includes our federally qualified health centers and private clinics.

However, our challenge of attracting quality healthcare professionals to the territory remains. For those professionals already here, and our residents who rely on their services, we want to assure you that our agenda to move forward with the reconstruction of our hospitals and clinics is a priority.

As required by law, it is essential that we move to have our hospitals operate under one single hospital board.

We will be sending legislation to unify our hospital system finally.

Our strategic approach to governance also requires that we modernize our government and embrace technology. While we were very successful in securing an incredible amount of funds to rebuild our territory, we are faced with the challenge of having many critical projects that need to be completed concurrently and expeditiously.

It is of great concern that these projects have to go through a government pipeline that has traditionally been clogged with bureaucracy and hampered by a lack of technology.

The most glaring of these inefficiencies is the inability to get budgets on the government's financial management system and get contracts through the procurement process on time. We still have not initiated an electronic management system that allows for all parties to modify and adjust contracts in real time and expedite their approval.

As we add more projects to the system, important contracts that provide services for everything from care to our seniors to housing our inmates on the mainland get entangled in the bureaucracy, and vendors, unfortunately, go unpaid.

Frankly, the time to digitize our government is now.

It is an investment that will pay dividends for years to come. Our administration will move to make every government service a digital proposition for both internal and external customers. Availing our employees of these new tools will increase their productivity and make more efficient the delivery of public services.

Eliminating these inefficiencies will facilitate new investment and create even greater customer satisfaction, but for Virgin Islanders to benefit fully from the opportunities we attract, we must have an educated and prepared workforce.

Our focus is on building a workforce pipeline that can usher young Virgin Islanders along a path from headstart through post-secondary education. But in building that pipeline, we must first ensure that we make good on our commitment to our educators, for they are the architects and engineers who build, maintain and ensure the operational success of that pipeline.

I am grateful to have two of these educators here tonight. It is a privilege, and indeed an honor to introduce you to the 2018-2019 Teacher of the Year for the St. Croix District, Ms. Kerra Samuel, who is also our State Teacher of the Year.

And the 2018-2019 Teacher of the Year for the St. Thomas-St. John District, Ms. Shernore Prince.

Congratulations to you both. The people of the Virgin Islands are ever grateful for your commitment to shaping and tooling our most treasured resource— our young people. We owe you, and all educators a sincere debt of gratitude.

During the campaign, Lieutenant Governor Roach talked about a student at Claude O. Markoe School who had impressed him with her earnest plea to fix her school. Her name is Lenice Yacub.

I have had the privilege of visiting several schools throughout the territory. One of them was the Claude O. Markoe Elementary School in Frederiksted, where I saw firsthand the tremendous job our teachers, administrators and support staff do on a daily basis— and too often without the proper resources.

I saw a school proudly celebrating its 60-year legacy, despite the myriad of challenges that come with a structure that old; infrastructure challenges that were compounded by storm-damage that went unaddressed.

But I have to admit that the students made more of an impression. Most every student I came into contact with, once they learned I was the new governor, advocated for improvements to be made to their learning environment.

In fact, it was there, that I received what I believe is my first constituent letter. It was from a sixth grader named Nakai Theodore, and he outlined those infrastructure challenges at his school. “Dr. Ryan’s classroom,” he wrote, “was decimated by hurricanes Irma and Maria,” and he asked if his school could receive a new gym, art room, and music room. He also opened his letter by requesting that my administration pave Carlton Road in Estate Carlton, as it has caused damages to his mother’s car.

Lenice and Nakai, the Bryan-Roach Administration will deliver on its promises.

I tell that story because it shows just how bright our future is in the hands of young people like

Lenice and Nakai, but also to underscore the need to deliver on our commitment to investing in the educational needs of our students. That you can, at 11 years-old, know what issues affect your progress, and how to engage those responsible, speaks volumes to the potential of our students.

The future of students like Lenice and Nakai, who are so full of potential, and are destined for amazing things if given the right opportunities, is why developing this workforce pipeline is so critical. And who better to help develop this pipeline than a young, dynamic Virgin Islander like Racquel Berry, who I will be appointing as Commissioner of Education.

Our strategy is to utilize our Department of Education in tandem with the Department of Labor, the University of the Virgin Islands and our Career and Technical Board to focus on the intersectionality and make those our priorities in creating our workforce pipeline.

The key to this success, however, is continuing our focus on early childhood education. The expansion of the education system to include K-4, which has been mandated by law, is far overdue. That is the foundation of this pipeline.

It is our goal to expand this program into as many schools as it takes to ensure access to every four-year-old in the territory. I had the opportunity to see this in action at the Claude O. Markoe School through its “Granny Preschool” pilot program. It works! Some four-year-olds were already meeting the educational benchmarks of the average kindergarten student.

We have to, and we will retool our Career and Technical Training, and provide more access to students in the St. Thomas-St. John districts where there are limited resources.

We will move toward the goal of producing technically trained workers who are nationally certified. We are dedicating \$2 million in Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery funds specifically to apprenticeships and National Certification Programs.

The Bryan-Roach administration will demand that government contractors utilize this apprenticeship program for training young Virgin Islanders in specific trades.

We will put our young people to work.

We recognize that the current state of education, presents its challenges to these plans and we also understand the issues with our facilities and how the storms have exacerbated those problems.

We understand the urgent concern by parents and educators about the construction of the temporary schools and the reconstruction of more permanent facilities. We are cognizant of timelines, but our greatest concern is that we place our children in the safest facilities possible each day for them to learn.

Another challenge we face is the inability to completely utilize grant funding by the reporting deadlines.

In light of this and other persistent grant funding problems, we will initiate an electronic grant monitoring module. Not only will we be able to track the availability of grant funding in realtime, but we will also be able to identify grants that are underperforming. This system will be accompanied by additional personnel to staff the grants management office and monitor these critical funds.

This division will also be responsible for identifying new grant opportunities and securing the funding. In conjunction with departments, they will issue grants management policy that is uniform through all departments ensuring fewer negative findings on audits and performance reports.

It is time that we resolve this costly proposition.

The status of our education system is far-reaching and is a key contributor to poverty and the socioeconomic issues that often lend to crime.

Issues with crime in our community have persisted far too long. We are at a crisis point.

Last year ended with an uptick in violent crime, and the trend has continued into the new year.

We have lost five Virgin Islanders to senseless violence this month. That is unacceptable. And what is more unnerving, is this has occurred in January four times in the last five years. I am committed to doing what we must to ensure that next January we have none.

We can all agree the level of violent crime is entirely too high for a small community such as ours. Any per capita comparison of our homicide rate with those of other states and countries yields an embarrassingly painful result.

But the prevalence of crime is not the root of our problems. It is the bitter fruit of entrenched social and economic woes that have plagued our community for generations. Crime in our territory is driven by pervasive poverty, poverty is caused by lack of economic opportunity, and lack of economic opportunity is spurred by a failing education system.

We can no longer afford to ignore these systemic underpinnings which lead our people to resort to violent crime as a means of conflict resolution or to criminal activity for financial gain.

We must, once and for all, address the root of the problem. And doing so will require the coordinated effort of all our justice and public safety, education, and recreational resources.

The Department of Justice, the Virgin Islands Police Department and coordinating federal agencies will work together to investigate and prosecute crimes from beginning to end to avoid holes in our prosecutions and avoid those guilty of crimes from escaping justice due to technicalities.

Punishment for crimes, though, will be geared towards deterrence and rehabilitation, recognizing the need for programs and educational and vocational training to integrate into society those members of our community who went down the wrong path.

We will also activate the long-dormant policy-making function of the Law Enforcement Planning Commission to collect data and create initiatives and programs targeted at eradicating the root causes of our crime problem.

Every year, the Territory has hundreds-of-thousands of dollars available to target juvenile and delinquency prevention. We must make those dollars work to stem the increasing numbers of youthful offenders who will grow up to be hardened adult criminals if we don't act now.

Finally, we will talk to and work with the Courts to review current trial intervention initiatives and propose new initiatives that will provide vocational training to the members of our community who unfortunately have turned to crime as a way to make a living, thereby providing alternatives to punishment that will benefit our community as a whole.

To further these justice initiatives, we must also preserve the integrity of the Attorney General's role, which is why my administration is sending down legislation to allow for the appointment of the Attorney General to a six-year term and allow the removal of the Attorney General for cause only.

No longer will the Attorney General be beholden to the politics of any particular administration, rather the Attorney General will serve in the best interest of the people and this Territory, regardless of who is sitting in Government House.

The Bryan-Roach administration will also take common sense approaches to deter crime including improving the lighting in our towns and increasing the use of surveillance cameras. It is important that our small businesses in the towns and business centers feel safe. We will continue the efforts to recruit additional police officers and look forward to the new class of officers graduating next month.

But, reducing crime in our community is more than a matter of law enforcement or executive action. It is about building up our young people and creating disincentives to the perpetual cycle of criminal activity. It is about building communities and making a commitment to supporting targeted prevention and behavioral support programs.

We need to improve the socioeconomic standing for many of our families and do better in our efforts to offer places of refuge for our young people who believe they are out of alternatives.

Because the best youth crime prevention program is a sense of belonging.

I am concerned with the high number of young individuals who are growing up and being raised in impoverished households. Growing up poor often leads to poor nutrition, inadequate education, inadequate healthcare, and a general lack of opportunities for advancement. We as a community must declare war on poverty. We will develop programs to promote savings and asset building, to encourage financial literacy, to promote entrepreneurship and micro-enterprise development.

We will increase access to post-secondary education and training opportunities and develop programs to engage at-risk youth. We will also expand the availability of affordable housing and ensure universal access to affordable healthcare. These are the basic necessities of any household.

Breaking the cycle of multi-generational poverty will be our mission. We should strive to ensure that our children enjoy greater opportunities and a better quality of life than we did.

The most constant and pervasive cry in our campaign was the need to invest in and modernize

our infrastructure. The most critical in our vision for a progressive and prosperous agenda is modernizing our infrastructure: WAPA, Waste Management, Port Authority, and our roads.

The Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority remain the most vulnerable of our assets. The authority is in a precarious cash position with mounting debt but yet has the potential of finally resolving our power woes once and for all.

Somewhere along the way, we lost our way on our energy goal of 60 percent reduction in fossil fuel consumption by 2025. We cannot hit landing points towards that target if we don't put in the work now. WAPA's fiscal affairs can only be characterized as abysmal.

The hurricanes made no exception for WAPA, and they too have debts including fuel debts of over \$50 million and infrastructure debt of over \$200 million in the last several years alone.

The reality of the situation is that WAPA has continued to fail us in providing the solutions that will lower our light bills, and we have failed as a government to provide them with the adequate cash flows and the support that would assist in putting them on the right footing.

This time we have an opportunity to work together and reduce our reliance on fossil fuel, make our power generation more efficient, and create grid resiliency across the territory, but the path is not easy, and we all will have to make sacrifices to get our power bills down permanently.

The road may get rough, but it won't be too long.

The addition of the underground lines, micro-grids and expanding renewable energy was once only things we could hope for. Now they can become a reality with the Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery and other FEMA grants. We can do more.

As we rebuild the territory, we can build a power system that is not only resilient and efficient but also scalable. This allows for less fuel being wasted on spinning reserve and quicker responses to power disruptions in the system.

We must aggressively continue our trek as we add wind generation, solar and finally seek a clean waste to energy solution.

This is a solution to the waste more than it is to energy, but we cannot move forward without

incorporating it into our plan. Imagine the power we could have created with the tremendous amount of green waste generated by the storm. All of those fallen trees powering our brighter tomorrow.

There is entirely too much waste littering our beautiful island landscape. It is time to find a solution to stop the runoff of silt and garbage into our oceans and mangroves. We are initiating a territory-wide campaign against trash. The mainstay of our economy is our ecology, if we don't take care of this environment eventually no one will want to visit it.

The Waste Management Authority is looking more and more like an experiment that went horribly wrong. The failing institution has been furthered towards its downward spiral by tumultuous leadership, insufficient funds, and plain waste mismanagement.

While many are calling for the agency to be merged back under the Department of Public works, merely calling it something else does not fix the problem.

The agency continues to be hampered by the lack of a tipping fee that is adequate and a garbage problem that literally continues to grow daily. As old people say, half of something is better than all of nothing. It is time to institute a tipping fee of some rate. Even at a minimal rate, it starts to generate some income and chips away at the financial burden of managing our waste.

We will work with the legislature and the Public Services Commission to restructure and establish a stable and financially sound WMA that is capable of managing all the solid waste and wastewater.

The mouth of our economy has to be the Port Authority. This is the entryway for the majority of goods, services, and people that enter our shores. Over the last few years, the leadership and the management of the agency have been eroded by petty politics and neglect. Our airports, while under repair, still lag in the rate of recovery that is required for us to become a viable tourism product once again.

Simple maintenance on the airports persists for months without resolution. Both airports are dark at night and suffer from inadequate and faulty lighting.

The FAA has levied fines of over \$1 million and remains concerned about our attention to safety at our facilities. The dredging, parking facilities, grants, and other port projects are all behind and

now have to compete with the rebuilding of all the other facilities at the port as well as in the community.

We have to act with exigency to establish leadership and stabilize the Port Authority. I have met with the board members and advised them to move expeditiously to initiate the search for a new executive director, and my staff is doing the due diligence to secure new board members.

The final part of our infrastructure is our roadways and supporting systems. The good news is that we have begun the process of repairing and repaving many of our roadways. During the next several months you will witness the feverish work of paving companies and contractors that will transform our roads, replace our traffic lights and place new signs to direct traffic and guide residents and visitors alike.

These are the essentials for driving our economic growth; energy, waste management, and infrastructure repairs. As we move to attract visitors and investment, we have to ensure that the first impression is impressive and lasting and delivers the confidence in our government, the people and our territory.

In the past, we have changed our support for initiatives as we have changed governors. In doing so, we have created distrust and inconsistencies amongst our investment community.

In the last transition, the construction of Paul E. Joseph Stadium was delayed along with several other projects including Long Bay Landing. This cannot and will not continue. Government is a continuum. We will be moving forward and assisting with support for private sector projects as we continue to vet the projects and their investors for their integrity and commitment to the Virgin Islands.

There are several projects however that must be given special attention to ensure that they are completed and put into service as quickly as possible. These include the St. Thomas Waterfront Apron expansion, the St. Croix Dredging of Gallows Bay, the St. Thomas Main Street project, the St. Croix Paul E Joseph Stadium, the reconstruction of St. Thomas' Frenchman's Reef Hotel and the Caneel Bay Resort in St. John. These represent essential pieces of our tourism and social fabric and must be given priority.

As we look to the future, we are heartened by the size and scope of the private sector projects

that are seeking government support. We will be aiding and supporting projects that expand our marine industry and will be sending down legislation in the second quarter that will incentivize the building of marinas, shipyard, dry docks and training for marine service personnel.

For too long we have governed with our backs to the water and ignored the vast potential of pleasure as well as cargo-craft and the supporting industries. We are seeking partners to bring this vision of a vibrant charter-yacht and repair industry to the Virgin Islands. The Marine Development Act will also include provisions to provide more access to our young people to the water and careers in the marine industry.

Our Economic Development Authority will play a significant role in bringing new investment to our shores. Between the Research and Technology Park and the Economic Development Authority, we have over six different vehicles that provide tax incentives for potential investors.

We will be using all of our resources in conjunction to create packages that will help to attract hotel developers, as well as financial services and other companies.

Our focus will be on STEAM for our economy. Services, Technology, Energy, Agriculture, and Manufacturing.

We sustained over \$10 billion in property damage and economic loss due to the two Category 5 hurricanes that devastated our Territory only 16 months ago. We must provide diverse and impactful economic opportunities for our residents. Our beloved Territory needs a STEAM-based economic development strategy.

The EDA will aggressively move forward now with business recruitment, expansion, and development efforts. We need more companies to come to the Territory, we need more existing businesses to expand their operations, and we need more local entrepreneurs to launch businesses.

In addition to promoting robust economic development now, we must have a bold, aggressive, and longterm plan to grow our economy, create jobs and generate wealth. We must move forward now and shape the future we want for ourselves, our children, and their children.

We will develop a 20-year economic vision which will empower our people, promote prosperity, and break cycles of poverty in this Territory that have lasted for generations.

The EDA has been designated to lead a new multi-agency initiative “U.S. Virgin Islands Vision 2040”. This Task Force will develop and deploy this long-term economic vision for the entire Territory. We are “one” Territory and need “one” vision reflecting the uniqueness of each island.

Today, the Vision 2040 Task Force members include the Governor’s office, the Lieutenant Governor’s Office, a host of other agencies and private-sector partners.

By October 1st, the 20-year vision will have been developed and be ready to be deployed.

The U.S. Virgin Islands is America’s Business Paradise and our best days are yet to come.

But, If we are honest, the Virgin Islands of the United States has not achieved the level of prosperity we desire or deserve. The problems confronting our territory have spanned multiple generations and many administrations.

Every day, as I walk around, and in anticipation of tonight, people keep reminding me that I am making history. It is a sobering thought that causes me to contemplate all the steps that had to be taken for me to come before you on this night. I must acknowledge that the majority of those steps were not made by me but by people just like yourselves that have paved the way for me to get here.

If not for a simple conversation with a teacher at an early age in my life who took the time to relay that she cared and what I could individually achieve if I took my studies and my life seriously, I would not be standing here. I want to remind each one of you that every day, you make history. Individually and collectively, that’s how a society works. One of the first conversations that I had with then-Senator Roach, he opined on the importance of doing one’s job well. “Everybody knows what the other person should be doing,” he said.

“We should focus in on perfecting the jobs that we are tasked with.” In that simple statement is the key to our success, that each one of us focuses in on our task and doing the best job possible. These tasks range from throwing our trash in receptacles to the most important tasks of raising our young people.

Tonight, I ask you to take on this mantra to be the best you can be individually and collectively we will be the best Virgin Islands we can be. It is not a responsibility to be shared by the leadership alone but as the society as a whole. One Virgin Islands collectively moving forward to a brighter

future for all of us.

It is up to this new generation of leaders to work collectively and move beyond politics to solve these longstanding issues so that future generations of Virgin Islanders can enjoy the quality of life that is consistent with the beauty and splendor of these Virgin Islands we call home. We owe it to our children.

We owe it to our grandchildren, and we owe it to their future generations, and we certainly owe it to our parents.

This is a charge I have given myself, and a charge Lieutenant Governor Roach has joined me in. And tonight, I implore you to join us as we chart this course towards a brighter Virgin Islands for all of us.

God bless you all and God bless the Virgin Islands.



Government House US Virgin Islands ~ <http://www.vi.gov>

*Printed by the Department of Property and Procurement
Division of Printing*