

Rush Transcript of Governor Bryan's April 27, 2020 COVID-19 Update

Good Day,

To date, we have tested 780 individuals for COVID-19 in the territory. 716 of those tests came back negative, 59 positive and we have five tests pending. 51 of the 59 have recovered, which means we are currently tracking four active cases in the territory, and regrettably, we have recorded a 4th fatality. That is a solemn reminder that this virus continues to be a clear and present danger.

The deceased is a 67-year-old female resident of St. Croix who died in her home. She tested positive for COVID after her passing.

There are no COVID-19 patients hospitalized at either of our hospitals. If you are experiencing symptoms of fever, shortness of breath, dry cough, or fatigues, especially if you have recently traveled into the territory or been around someone who may have, please call the Department of Health hotline numbers. Those numbers are 340-712-6299 for St. Croix residents and 340-776-1519 for residents in the St. Thomas/ St. John District.

We continue to take measures to mitigate against the economic fallout of the COVID 19 pandemic. Our VI Department of Labor has been aggressively pushing out unemployment checks. So far, they have issued 1595 checks totaling \$1,110,365.00 .

Today I am pleased to announce that we have allocated the \$15.5 million to provide relief to WAPA's electrical customers under our YES Program. The YES CARES Act credit or your emergency stimulus will provide residential customers with a \$250 credit on their electricity bill and a \$500 credit on the bills of commercial customers. The credit will appear as a line on the monthly bill stating YES Cares Act Credit. The credit only applies to active electrical accounts and cannot be converted to cash. These credits will appear in the May billing cycle. If the credit is not fully utilized on the May bill, the balance will roll over to your next month's bill.

I'm also pleased to announce that as of 10:30 am this morning, the US Small Business Association will be accepting applications from small business owners in the territory for loans from the Paycheck Protection Program. Additional funding for this program was recently appropriated by Congress.

To date, 240 Virgin Islands businesses have received more than 62 million under the PPP. I want to encourage all small businesses to please take advantage of this program. I also want to remind business owners that SBA will forgive loans if all employees are kept on the payroll for eight weeks, and the money is used for rent, mortgage interest, or utilities.

As you are aware, the current stay at home order expires on April 30th, and we will be issuing a new order that will describe the phased reopening of non-essential businesses and the guidelines that they will be subject to. Our intention is to begin reopening the local economy in preparation for eventually returning access to the outside world. I know there are mixed opinions on the best path forward, I think of our approach as a three-legged stool. One leg represents your safety and

the concerns of the public health, one leg represents our economic concerns, and the third leg represents our concerns regarding personal freedom. In order to be effect, all three must work in concert.

Over the next few weeks, and perhaps months, we will try to optimize the balance of these concerns. That will require some trial and error. As we approach this phased reopening, we will take things one step at a time. If we find that we are heading in the wrong direction as a community, we will fall back to the prior restrictions. Our progress depends on the cooperation of the general public. Part of our rollout will include an alert system, and we will try to make our decisions and the reasons for those decisions as clear and transparent as possible.

During the next two weeks, we will be sending various legislation for consideration to the 33rd legislature. It is important that we start to adjust for the economic storm ahead of us and life with COVID -19. One of the actions that we will be taking is to change the definition of "in-person" in the VI Code. When most of the in-person requirements for boards and commissions, and even the legislature were conceived, we did not have the benefit of the many technological advances of today's world. In-person could only be manifested by actually showing up at the meeting. Today one is ever-present no matter where you are in the world by instant messaging, phone, and video. It is past time that our law reflects these technological advancements, and the current situation mandates that we adjust post haste. First, we will do so by executive order, and it is our hope that the legislation we have crafted will be adopted into law. This is necessary for us to continue to make timely decisions, no matter where we are in the world.

We have taken the first step in this change in the latest addendum to the executive order, which allows for the waiving of this in-person requirement for notaries. The executive order issued last weeks allows notaries to certify documents using live video and a valid photo ID.

We will also be transmitting the request to extend the executive order to July 12th to the legislature, as is required by law. Currently, the law only allows us to request a 30-day extension, we are asking the legislature to consider 60 days due to the infrequency of hearings and the fact that we will most likely be in this state of emergency for the balance of the summer.

Tomorrow we will be sending a revision to the Cannabis Legislation to the legislature. We have taken the time to gather further public input as well as address the concerns of the individual legislators. As the economic disaster, the last few weeks has created has affected the GERS greatly it is our hope that we can have a greater sense of exigency in implementing all the things that can help us regain solvency. Once again, it is not the panacea, but certainly cutting the annuity of retirees by 30% cannot be the path either.

We grow increasingly frustrated by the Federal Treasury and their failure to issue the policy to administer the stimulus funds to Puerto Rico and the Territories. We are calling on the delegate to help us to get these funds to us faster. We are not second class citizens and are quite tired of being treated as such. The latest conversations indicate that the payments will be delayed until the end of May or June. This is unacceptable, and we will continue to work to get this money to our residents.

It is going to be a while before we get through this, and we have to be trusting and brave in order to make it. This is totally uncharted water. No one has been here before, and we are adjusting to the virus and the myriad of situations that it creates by the minute. It was always our goal to flatten the curve, and we have been very successful, but the reality is that we will have peaks and valleys all along the way.

We have adjusted our peak time based on what we are seeing in the community and the reality that we will always have the threat of peaks if we don't manage the virus properly. I would like to remind the public that we were never closed so come Friday, we are not reopening but just broadening the scope of what business and recreation can be conducted safely.

We will continue to be vigilant and use all the information and resources we have to grow the economy, respect your personal freedom, and, most importantly, keep you and your family safe.

####