GOVERNMENT HOUSE
UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 8, 2021
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Governor Bryan Discusses Return to In-Person Learning, Lifting of International Travel Ban in United States

Bryan-Roach Administration's 8 percent Wage Repayments Going Out This Week And Says He is Finalizing a Proposal for a Permanent Solution for the GERS

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS – During Monday's Government House weekly press briefing, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. discussed the Virgin Islands Department of Education's return to in-person learning, which will be phased in beginning in January 2022 and President Biden's announcement this week that he is lifting the international travel ban and will begin allowing vaccinated visitors to come into the country.

The Governor said resuming in-person learning for students in 4th through 12th grades is vital for the educational needs of the Territory's students and is a key part of returning to normalcy from the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We have had a model that has proved successful in keeping our students, faculty and staff safe for months now. In addition, we have available for children ages 5 and older the vaccine, which has also proven effective in dramatically reducing the chances of severe illness or death from COVID," Governor Bryan said. "We need to move forward for the sake of our students and their educational needs. So I ask the parents out there to get vaccinated and vaccinate your children who are eligible to receive the vaccine and I am also asking our educators to do the same. This is the most effective form of protection there is against COVID-19."

The Governor also pointed to President Biden's removal of the international travel ban as the world taking a step toward normalcy and said the current rules to enter the U.S. Virgin Islands, which have proven extremely effective, will remain as they are.

"The United States will now allow fully vaccinated travelers at airports and land borders, doing away with a COVID-19 restriction that dates back more than 20 months. The new rules will allow air travel from previously restricted countries if the traveler has proof of vaccination and a negative COVID-19 test, like what we have in place here in the Territory with our USVI travel portal," Governor Bryan said. "The current requirements to enter the USVI will remain in place for the foreseeable future. Those requirements include submitting through the USVI travel portal a negative PCR or Antigen test taken within 5 days of the date of your travel to the territory or uploading proof of vaccination within the USVI."

8 percent wage repayment

As promised, the Bryan-Roach Administration began sending out checks and direct deposits this week of the 8 percent wage repayment from the 2011 V.I. Economic Stability Act.

"This action marks a significant departure from a period of extreme austerity in which our government was actively discussing budget cuts, furloughs and payless paydays," Governor Bryan said. "It demonstrates that the sound financial management of the Bryan-Roach Administration is paying dividends. This is especially evident when you consider the devastating economic impact of the 2017 hurricanes and the Covid-19 pandemic."

The Governor thanked Senate President Donna Frett-Gregory and the members of the 34th Legislature for shepherding through the legislation that makes the repayment of these wages possible.

The Governor also said that at the time of the wage cuts, many people could not imagine that the Government of the Virgin Islands would find itself in a position to restore the lost wages.

"We are especially pleased to be able to deliver on this promise at this time of year as families prepare for the holiday season. We know that the high cost of electricity, food, and the overall inflation we are experiencing creates extreme stress in our community," Governor Bryan said. "We hope that this week's payments will prove to be a timely stimulus, at least for a few households.

Residents can check the Division of Personnel website (dopusvi.org) and make sure their information in the Personnel database regarding the 8 percent repayment is correct.

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To do so, click on the tab at the top of the web page for "Employees" then click the link that says "8% Salary Restoration." The website also contains instructions for the survivors of government employees who are deceased and are owed money to receive those funds.

GERS Funding

The Governor also said the Administration is finalizing a proposal that could bring a permanent solution to the extreme financial distress faced by the Government Employees' Retirement System and bring a long-lasting benefit and relief to 17,000 beneficiaries.

"Very quietly we have been working with the Legislature on perhaps our greatest challenge as a government. In the coming months we will once again embark on a proposal that may be able to fix the GERS permanently," Governor Bryan said. "Just like the 8%, we will be working together with our friends in the Legislature to bring about change in our community. We will need your confidence, support and understanding to get it done."

Governor Bryan traveling to Jacksonville, Dallas
The Governor said he will be traveling later this week, accompanied by Virgin Islands Port Authority Executive Director Carlton Dowe, to Jacksonville, Florida, for meetings with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers about the dredging permits at three of the Territory's harbors and to discuss flood mitigation for the guts in Estate La Grange on St. Croix and Savan on St. Thomas.

The Governor said that while he is stateside, he and Executive Director Dowe also will travel to Dallas, Texas, for meetings with officials at American Airlines to discuss additional airlift to the territory.

"As the country starts to reopen and allow for less restrictive international travel, we want to maintain our competitive edge in the tourism market," Governor Bryan said. "As such, I am making the rounds in support of the Department of Tourism and the Port Authority."

Midre Cummings Park Volunteers
In conjunction with the renovation of the Midre Cummings Recreational and Youth Facility in Frederiksted, which is slated to kick off on Friday, November 12 and continue for one week, Our Town Frederiksted and Children First St. Croix are still looking for volunteers to help assemble and install the new playground equipment. Governor Bryan said this effort is a community project, and he urged individuals and organizations to lend a few hours of support.

To volunteer, please contact Administrator Sammuel Sanes at 340-773-1404 or Sana Joseph Smith at 340-201-3791.

Pop-Up Vaccinations
Residents can get vaccinated at no cost at the Community Vaccination Center (CVC) located in each district; both facilities accept scheduled appointments and walk-up requests for the vaccine.

Anyone 5 and older is eligible to receive the vaccine. Please make sure to have a parent or guardian accompany any minor wishing to get vaccinated and bring an ID for both the minor and the parent or guardian.

For information about the COVID-19 vaccines or to schedule an appointment to get vaccinated, call the VITEMA hotline Mondays-Fridays from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. at 340-777-VACS (8227). Vaccination appointments also can be scheduled online at covid19usvi.com/vaccines.

Anyone who thinks they may have contracted COVID-19 can call the Epidemiology hotline at 340-712-6299 or 340-776-1519. For more information, visit covid19usvi.com.

COVID-19 cases as of November 8
- 2.7% seven-day positivity rate
- Currently tracking 90 active cases (81 STX; 8 STT; 1 STJ).
- 209,448 individuals tested to date.
- 7,290 individuals tested positive.
- 7,117 individuals have recovered.
- 83 fatalities.
- There are 3 COVID-19 patients hospitalized, with 1 on a ventilator, at Juan F. Luis Medical Center on St. Croix.

- There is 1 COVID-19 patient hospitalized at Schneider Regional Medical Center on St. Thomas.

The Bryan-Roach Administration is investing in the Territory's people, infrastructure and future through transparency, stabilizing the economy, restoring trust in the government and ensuring that recovery projects are completed as quickly as possible. Visit transparency.vi.gov.

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