



State of the Territory Address | January 23, 2023

Legislature USVI

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- 0:00:01 We're excited by the opportunity to continue the work of improving the quality of life for all Virgin Islanders who call here home. I would like to congratulate the Honorable Ray Fonseca and the Honorable Maurice James on your ascension to service within this August body. I also welcome the return of the Honorable Diane Capehart to these hallowed chambers. I extend congratulations to all the newly sworn in members of the 35th legislature. I look forward to doing meaningful work with all of you. This past year, we lost two great men who both held this office prior to me, the Honorable Dr. Roy Lester Schneider and the Honorable Dr. Charles Wesley Turnbull. The former was a remarkable physician and the latter a passionate educator and historian.
- 0:00:56 Please join me in a moment of silence as we honor their contributions to the development of these islands. I thank them, their families, and those that worked in their employ, for the invaluable service to the people of the Virgin Islands. Tonight, we also honor the service of our men and women of the Virgin Islands National Guard as they have volunteered to support the nation's military forces in defending America from threats both foreign and domestic. As we speak, Virgin Islands Army National Guard soldiers from the 114th Aviation Detachment are deployed along the southern border of the United States supporting the Department of Homeland Security. We also have several members serving on our active duty tours at the National Guard Bureau in Arlington, Virginia, West Point Military Academy, and Fort Benning, Georgia. Beyond these locations, service members are in the training pipeline at military installations across the nation.
- 0:02:16 Our thoughts and prayers are with them as they perform their duty and fulfill their missions. After four years of steady progress, in the face of unprecedented crisis, I remain infernally optimistic about the future of these islands. That optimism is not anecdotal. It is bolstered by the tremendous growth in our business, social welfare, and private sectors, and the steady pace towards the Vision 2040 plan that was developed by this community. The reality is that after years of planning and hoping to find the resources to address the needs of our territory, we have finally begun the journey toward a new era of prosperity. Progress is incremental. With each step comes new challenges, but we have faced and conquered

formidable hurdles in the last four years and have managed to overcome them with great skill and irrefutable success. success. As we charge on amid a \$12 billion recovery from the ravages of Hurricane Irma and Maria, I have come to realize that recovery is a misnomer.

0:03:35 This is not a quest to return to where we have been, but a transformational journey to a place we could not have previously imagined. Our troubles have changed. Our troubles have changed from dire social and economic challenges to ones that are mired in finding enough people who are committed to bringing forth this new expanded vision of our collective future. The election is over and I hope that we can join together as Virgin Islanders to realize the prosperity that is abundant enough for all of us not just for some timing is everything amidst all the uncertainties we see in the world around us there has never been a moment of greater opportunity for us collectively as a community and as individual virgin islanders to pursue our hopes and dreams. I would never lead you to believe that this journey will be easy, nor that we will not have our setbacks that are beyond our control.

0:04:52 But today I can proudly declare that the state of the territory is full of promise. I spent the last eight months telling you about all the accomplishments of the administration. But of the administration's many accomplishments, our greatest thus far, is the improved fiscal health of our government. Four years ago, we promised to stabilize government finances and we, frankly, outdated ourselves. We managed not only to stabilize the failing pension system, but we also realized economic growth during the global pandemic. while many other economies showed a decline.

0:05:45 In this march forward, revenues continue to be a highlight for the territory. The general fund operating revenues has increased every single time for the last three years that I've been up here, thanks to the leadership from our financial team. Our revenues increased 12.6% between fiscal year 21 and fiscal 22. Corporate income taxes showed particularly robust growth during that period, increasing by 54.4%. And real property tax collections in fiscal year 22 exceeded revenue forecasts by 3.5 million.

0:06:27 And part of the reason for this increase is a modernization of our property tax system. No longer do you have to drive to your local property tax office to pay your bills. You can now pay those bills and access information you need from the comfort of your home or your office. Last year, the office of the Lieutenant Governor launched for the first time in the Virgin Islands a citizen's online portal. Property owners who are unable to pay their property taxes all at once can now establish easily payment plans through this same very portal. This update to our property tax collection management has streamlined payments for all homeowners, and we look forward to further improvements to the system. In my promise to modernize government, we have made it easier overall to access information and actually pay for those services. In the years ahead, we can look forward to a burgeoning construction sector as we strive to infuse at least \$800 million in federal spending into our economy each year. Now, growth in overall gross territorial product of 2% is considered massive and robust.

0:07:50 This is an almost 20 percent increase in spending every year for the next four years. Further, we expect that this influx of dollars will continue annually for at least the next ten years. This money does not fully safeguard us against recessions and other economic disruptions, but it does assure us that we will have a steady stream of capital spending for the foreseeable future. If that wasn't enough, we have been further blessed by the hard work of our delegate and our team in Washington. As a result of their efforts, we have been able to offset some of the financial pain of inflation, some of it directly through financial subsidies to our residents, and some of it indirectly by allaying the rising cost of energy.

0:08:39 We have the benefit of these funds from the American Rescue Plan Act, or ARPA, for the next four years and will undertake projects to address mental health and social well-being and to secure the economic growth of our territory. These are not hopes and dreams, but plans and strategies to assure the government of the Virgin Islands is and remains on solid financial footing. The growth in our general fund revenues has enabled us to raise salaries for teachers, corrections officers, police officers, nurses, and general workers. We fulfilled our obligations on long-term debts that had been owed to workers for years and paid the salary increases negotiated by our administration, get this, within the same year we negotiated. We prioritized the people and ensured that they had money in their pockets to stave off this rising inflation. A rising tide must float all boats, and it has. We must be mindful that government spending is not only good for government spending, but It actually spurs private sector activity. When the government spends, these expenditures are multiplied in the private sector.

0:10:16 The need for more housing, food, gas, restaurants, and services will continue to generate additional dollars to take care of our general fund obligations and allow for the greater provision of public services for our community. This expanding economic pie has been evident in our robust private sector. We have experienced continued growth as a result from new business development, vigorous tourism activity, and infrastructure investment. Our administration continues to support the growth and development of our small businesses and attract new capital investment into the territory. One of the eight goals of the Vision 2040 plan is to increase the net growth of businesses in the territory and ensure that entrepreneurs

have access to support and capital to scale their businesses. We have evidence of our success as the number of new business license applications more than doubled from 1,027 filed in 2021 to 2,239 in 2022. That's an increase of over 1,200 new business licenses, which significantly surpassed all our projections. The unemployment rate in the territory declined to 5.3 percent in September 22, which is higher than the pre-pandemic rate of 3.5 percent of February 2020. But reason for celebration when you consider that unemployment averaged 10% throughout the entire 2021. Initial unemployment claims are also considerably lower, 176 in August 22 compared to their April 2020 peak of 2,727. Private sector hiring has increased, supported by industries tied to tourism and construction. With the expansion in employment, the unemployment rate is expected to decline further this year. And for many businesses here and across the nation, finding employees has become a significant challenge. These are positive signs for those who are out there looking for work or to move ahead and seek new opportunities as we all continue to navigate a post-pandemic area.

0:12:41 Last year, we announced the launch of the Catalyst Fund Gap. the Catalyst Fund Gap Financing Initiative. Our administration, along with Senate President Novel Francis Jr., championed this initiative and made \$5 million in gap financing available to spur small businesses' development. The Research and Technology Park closed on the first Catalyst Fund loan in November, providing \$1.5 million to a small firm that will be manufacturing indoor hydroponic garden systems for producing leafy greens and herbs.

0:13:14 is an exciting new tool in our economic development toolbox that provides financing to existing local businesses and new startups with the potential to create more jobs for virgin islanders expanding our business products and remaining competitive regionally is important to our territory we continue to lose business and tax revenues to online commerce which has grown exponentially since the pandemic the only way to compete is to push innovation last year we were able to award four million dollars in support to 337 small businesses through the 2022 innovation grant that program provided qualified small businesses with up to fifty thousand dollars to implement innovative strategies to help their businesses expand and grow making them even more resilient to economic downturns and regionally competitive competitive during fiscal year 2022 the economic development commission received 21 benefit applications that's almost 25 percent of all the applications we have that has a total potential economic impact of approximately 10 million dollars to be paid out in taxes and sorry in wages and over 7.7 million to be made in capital investments. These applicants represent the potential for the U.S. Virgin Islands to realize an estimated \$45 million in taxes over the next five years. The University of the Virgin Islands continues to contribute to the sustainable economic development of our islands through its research and Technology Park and the Small Business Development Center. Likewise, we congratulate the economic development authority on its investment promotion activities that are critical contributor to our economic diversification the tourism sector continued to be resilient in 22 2022 leading the charge in tourism is commissioner joseph bushelti who was recently awarded caribbean tourism executive of the year

0:15:28 by the Carib Journal. He and his team have garnered recognition for the territory from Condé Nast Traveler, Travel and Leisure, Porthole Cruise and Travel Magazine, Formers, and Yahoo Life. The number of visitors to the territory increased last year to over 1.6 million, which is a 116% increase from the prior year. Air visitors remain robust, increasing by 11 percent through September 22 over the previous year. Cruise passengers plumped to 30,194 in 2020, but began to recover in the third quarter of 21 and reached over 777,000 in fiscal year 22, an astounding 2,475 percent above 2021.

0:16:27 I must applaud the Virgin Islands Port Authority on its work to nearly triple the amount of cruise passengers visiting the island of St. Croix. Seeing two cruise ships docked at Frederickstead fair is no longer a rare sight. My office hosted five community business forums to prepare St. Croix businesses and the Frederickstead community for the return of cruise ships i want to take this opportunity to thank my former former chief legal counsel david born for his inviolable contributions to moving the economic development policy of the virgin islands forward over the last four years thank you david in st thomas the cruise passengers continue to climb back to pre-covid numbers the west indian Company Limited has recently refinanced its debt to place it in even more of a positive financial light and was further assisted by \$2 million in funding that was invested by the local government. The dredging of the Inner Harbor in Charlotte and Mali is currently going through the Army Corps of Engineers permitting process. We have identified \$17 million in local funds for this project after several attempts to get the U.S. Housing and Urban Development to fund this project. The project's successful completion will allow us to comfortably accommodate the largest cruise ships serving the Caribbean region. We continue to work with HUD to fund the other dredging projects in Gallus Bay and in Crown Bay, and we are confident that we will be successful.

0:18:12 Early last year, Royal Caribbean committed to the redevelopment of Crown Bay and Frederickstead in a landmark deal negotiated by the Virgin Islands Port Authority. This public-private partnership will allow for the development of sub-base and the surrounding area, adding shops and restaurants and a new berth for St. Thomas. The development is anticipated to accommodate the thousands of new passengers we will see in both districts in the coming years. They have

also committed to offering more excursions to St. John to complement the resumption of small cruise ships visiting the islands, which started again last year.

- 0:18:51 Our hotel development is making steady progress towards returning to pre-hurricane room numbers. This year we will witness the reopening of the former Marriott Frenchman's Reef and Morningstar Beach Resort. Work has actually begun repairing roofs at the Sugar Bay property in St. Thomas, and we expect to see the Island Beachcomber Hotel awarded to a successful bidder by the end of the second quarter. The proposed new 120-room hotel for the West Indian Company dock is moving along and should be in construction before the end of 2023. In St. Croix, we have completed the lease of Protestant Key, which will be the site of a new 120-room hotel in the center of Christian Stead. The sale of King's Alley Hotel has allowed for the expansion of the King Christian Hotel in restaurant spaces, making a fine complement to the Christianstead boardwalk. The completion of the bulkhead in Christianstead by the National Park Service and the development of Hospital Street by private developers are restoring the town's overall allure.
- 0:19:57 It's not only hotels and cruise ships, though. I have to say that I am particularly proud of what we are doing to transform our tourism product. Just for one example, the new Vendors Plaza in downtown Charlotte Amala is a welcome sight. After enduring that previous eyesore for more than 20 years, this is complemented by brand new bathrooms and ATMs across the street. If that wasn't enough, we have finally attracted an investor with enough capital to demolish and reconstruct the old federal courthouse building that sits adjacent to the vendors' plaza. Right up the street, renovations at the Grand Hotel are ongoing. And the office building on the corner of Educators Park is getting a complete remodel as well.
- 0:20:54 Downtown development at its best. Earlier this year, President Biden signed into law the National Heritage Area Act, which finally designates the island of St. Croix as a national heritage area. This designation is the official recognition of the importance of St. Croix's natural, cultural, and historic resources to the nation. The designation opens a door for federal appropriations and technical assistance in developing St. Croix as a national heritage area.
- 0:21:41 I congratulate the Honorable Stacey Plaskett for her diligence and persistence in getting this measure across the finish line in Washington. But I would be remiss if I did not also acknowledge the vision and foresight of former Congresswoman Dr. Donna Christian, who got the ball rolling more than two decades ago when she introduced legislation to fund the initial feasibility study. This new designation will assist greatly in the promotion of heritage tourism in the market of St. Croix as a truly unique destination.
- 0:22:29 The recent establishment of the territorial park system, the first time, complements of the National Heritage Area Designation. To complement the National Heritage Area Designation, I would like to thank Senator Samuel Samy Carrion for shepherding this historic legislation through the Senate process. This system now for our own Virgin Islands Park system will hold lands in perpetuity for Virgin Islanders and our guests to enjoy. We are working diligently to finalize this agreement that will preserve over a thousand acres of historically significant maroon land up in the Northwest Park of St. Croix for the people of the Virgin Islands. This is only the first. We will be announcing several more land purchases and acquisitions to make sure that we have invested in our children's future and the land of the Virgin Islands.
- 0:23:34 Now, although tourism will remain the mainstay of our economy for the foreseeable future, we must continuously seek to expand and diversify. I congratulate the members of the 34th Legislature for the passage of the adult-use cannabis legislation. That action finally allows us to participate in what has been a growth industry throughout the country, no pun intended. We understand the high-risk, high-reward nature of this business, and so we will be taking cautious and conservative approaches to building the regulatory system that will sustain the cannabis industry in the Virgin Islands. The retailing of adult-use cannabis will certainly bring revenues and opportunities to our shores.
- 0:24:25 My real objective has always been to participate in the macroeconomics of this industry. Unfortunately, one of the most crucial parts of my original submission to the Senate was not included in the final consensus legislation that made its way to my desk. That provision in the original bill, which allowed for research under the university, could prove to be the most significant single revenue source in Virgin Islands history. By creating research opportunities, we can patent and trademark cannabis discoveries that would be used worldwide. Residuals and dividends from these trademarks could be in the hundreds of millions and would be returned to the Virgin Islands at a tax discount for the general fund. We intend to resubmit the legislation to this body, as we cannot afford to miss this very prosperous opportunity. The rebuilding of our infrastructure has been steady and consistent over the past years.
- 0:25:32 Even during the COVID economic shutdowns, work on hurricane recovery and other capital projects continued, now we are seeing the benefit of the effort. As a testament to this, the economic indicator that is most compelling is that a total of 2,375 construction permits were issued in fiscal year 22. The estimated construction value of those issued permits is a

whopping \$506 million. We cannot travel the road to prosperity if it remains unpaved. Road repairs and drainage and waterline construction have been a major focus of the Brian Rocha administration. Over the last two years alone, with the help of this body, we have invested over \$40 million in local funds for road projects.

- 0:26:30 Work on the final segments of the Melbourne H. Evans Highway will be completed by this summer. The improvements at the Container Port intersection are well on the way. This project completely rebuilds the connector road and redesigns that intersection to improve traffic flow by installing dedicated turn lanes. Other road projects on the west end of St. Croix will be commencing this year, including the federal routes through King, Queen and Strand Streets in Frederickstead. The Mahogany Road, which has fallen into considerable disrepair, we will begin work on that road this year. Drainage installation and road reconstruction are also scheduled to take place in Estate La Grange. On St. Thomas, road repairs will be completed in Estates Lilliendal and Marion Hole, Marion Dahl and Smith Bay. Repair projects begin soon on the First Avenue and for segments of the neighborhood roads in Estee Thomas. Road repairs on Water Island are also underway and will be completed within this calendar year. On St. John, repairs to damaged roads in Cruise Bay, Coral Bay and Fish Bay will be completed later this year. Now I could stand up here all night and name off road projects. And there will always be somebody will say my road didn't get paved though. See, we have done a considerable amount of resurfacing, but the real work of infrastructure as it pertains to roads is going to take years. It's not simply like laying asphalt, but coordinating efforts to dig once and properly lay electrical, water, sewer and telecommunication lines.
- 0:28:13 it's a coordination of multiple funding sources and several agencies to ensure that the infrastructure beneath our roadways is designed properly then to further complicate the issue the timing of funds that need to be coordinated amongst each agencies with various sources of federal and local funding it's a complete nightmare the work that our local professionals do in the the Department of Public Works, Water and Power Authority, Waste Management Authority, BI Next Generation Network, and Office of Disaster Recovery is nothing less than incredible. Thank you to you and your staff.
- 0:29:01 The Department of Public Works is executing several major drainage improvement projects. They are currently soliciting design bill contracts for drainage repairs in Frederickstead, First Avenue in downtown Charlotte and Mali. The Water and Power Authority continues to overhaul its water distribution system to improve water quality. It's currently wrapping up water line replacement projects in Estate Clifton Hill. It will soon begin major water line replacement projects in Estate Hannah's Rest in Campo Rico.
- 0:29:31 On St. Thomas, the water line along Veterans Drive is scheduled to be replaced in anticipation of phase two of the Veterans Drive Rehabilitation. WAPA will be extending service in the Nazareth area this year as well. And in water, there's over \$40 million in water expansion, not water replacement, water expansion projects scheduled to take place. The Waste Management Authority is completing sewer line replacements on Brookman Road, Saban, and Garden Street. Work is about to start on the replacement of sewer lines in downtown Christianstead. Over the next few years, as part of these infrastructure improvements, we will see the completion of over 200 capital projects just in infrastructure. Our airports, they are the gateways to our economy.
- 0:30:26 The Port Authority is currently pursuing a public-private partnership partnership to expand and modernize both airports, partnering with a qualified airport operator will provide the capital investment to construct new jetways, improve the concession areas, and otherwise fast track the development plans for these facilities. This is a perfect example of how we must approach major projects in this territory. public money and public resources to attract private investment that improves our infrastructure is a win-win-win-win all the time for everyone. The request for qualification has been issued and the Port Authority hopes to identify a development partner within 12 months. Within the next four years, we should see the complete modernization of our international airports, providing a better quality experience for our residents as well as our guests.
- 0:31:30 I assure you, ladies and gentlemen, the recovery is alive and well, positively impacting the territory's economy, strengthening critical infrastructure. The territory now anticipates more than \$12 billion in recovery funding. Seem like every time I come up here, I go up a billion. And \$7.4 billion of those funds have already been allocated for the recovery from hurricanes Irma and Maria. And I always like to say when I come up here, allocated, not obligated. That's a whole other step in getting the money where it needs to be.
- 0:32:09 The Territory paid out over \$460 million in recovery funding in 22 alone. In total, \$5.9 billion has been obligated from various federal sources, and over \$2.9 billion has been expended to date. We saw the completion of 34 recovery projects in 2022, including Vitima's tsunami warning system, the installation of brand new playground equipment, the Head Start campuses territory-wise, and the restoration of recreational facilities at Fort Frederick Beach and Frederickstead. As projected, we are poised to see a crescendo of projects in construction this year. Those projects include the \$160 million rebuild of the first new school in decades on St. Croix. This school is scheduled to break ground in February of this year, eight days February, not next year February. We also have three more schools right now out for bid for repair and

restructuring.

- 0:33:15 Overall, in 2023, the Office of Disaster Recovery Projects projects the completion of 44 projects and anticipates the start of over 930 million in recovery projects for this year alone. I think that all residents of this territory can agree, though, that the ongoing financial and operational woes at the Water and Power Authority are an impediment to any developmental progress we hope to make as a community.
- 0:33:46 As I campaigned for re-election last year, I tried my best to avoid making any bold pronouncements to solve issues that were beyond my direct control. The one exception to that, though, was WAPA. I have committed to fixing the issues of WAPA within my second term. As you have come to learn. Every time I come up here in January and I say something people are skeptical and in December it's done. So as you come to learn I'm a man of my word and we must create a symbiotic energy system that has multiple sources to the grid for our people. Now, I'm confident that setting this goal is going to happen because I know tremendous resources are being made available to help WAPA turn the corner in this problem. And this administration has the courage and the determination to see it through. For the first time in our history, we have the resources to make our energy affordable, reliable, and renewable.
- 0:34:56 Solving the energy crisis in the Virgin Islands was never really feasible until now. WAPA has attracted the attention of everyone from my government house to President Biden's White House and is steadily making progress on his transformational plan. The installation of four new generating units at the Randolph-Harley Power Plant in St. Thomas' ongoing project that WAPA is extremely focused on in bringing it to completion. Because once operational, these units will immediately improve the efficiency and reliability of the St. Thomas power plant. And the resulting operational savings will translate into lower electric rates for everybody. WAPA is nearing the completion of its negotiation with a small provider to provide utility-scale solar power on the island of St. Croix. Now, although my statements regarding this matter was misquoted in the media and ultimately politicized, the fact is, WAPA took my directive to them seriously and have identified Qualify's firm that can deliver between 50 to 100 percent of St. Croix's power from solar for a fraction of the current cost.
- 0:36:11 We anticipate that the solar farms will be fully operational within 12 to 18 months of the execution of these power purchase agreements. Equally promising is the realization that we also have developers that have the capacity to develop similar projects in St. Thomas and St. John's District. These projects will go a far way in reducing the cost of electricity in the territory. However, all this potential progress is jeopardized by the ongoing dispute between WAPA and VTOL, the owner and operator of WAPA's propane terminal. No one disputes that propane is less expensive than the diesel fuel that WAPA has solely been dependent on for power production. There is also very little dispute that the decision to proceed with the project made sense at the time under the circumstances. But unfortunately, WAPA and the Public Service Commission never really came to an agreement with VTOL on the true cost of the project, and the project has essentially become an unfunded mandate of the utility. WAPA is currently in discussions with VTOL to resolve this matter amicably, and we are very optimistic that we will be able to announce a positive resolution in short order. We intend to settle this debt once and for all and place WAPA on firm financial footing. Needless to say, this energy piece is probably the most significant thing that will happen in Virgin Islands history for the next 20 years. And it's the only way that we can make sure that our next step will be an economic future that is full of promise.
- 0:38:07 Now, I've been talking about economic growth, and economic growth is fantastic, as it affords us the ability to assist our people in ways we could have only dreamed of in past years. Four years ago, we promised we would take the fruits of this economic success and invested in our people, creating a quality of life that is equal to that of our counterparts on the mainland. Now, let's get real. Creating a quality of life that is equal to the mainland is no easy feat, and it's an ever-moving target, but we remain undaunted in this quest. In this endeavor, the health of our residents is foremost.
- 0:38:54 Thankfully, for the first time in two years, I can address this body absent our local state of emergency that was triggered by the COVID-19 global pandemic. Of course, it does not mean that the pandemic has ended. Unfortunately, Virgin Islanders continue to lose their lives to this deadly virus. But nationally, realize the declaration of emergency that was first declared by President Trump in March 2020 still remains in full effect. Most recently, the highly contagious XBB variant of the virus has been circulating rapidly, present person can tell you. However, we are confident in our capacity to treat Virgin Islanders who become infected and to implement the measures to keep our community safe and from the worst impacts of the pandemic as we have done in the past. We understand that the pandemic has stressed our resources, particularly our human resources. That's why we have allotted \$10 million to each hospital, Juan F. Louis and Royal Snyder, to support the recruitment and retention of nursing and allied health professionals. It is our hope that these financial incentives will assist us in maintaining critical healthcare capacity at our hospital. And if you don't think we're serious about our commitment to this, the nurses and allied health officials got 7,000 bonus last year. They're gonna get 7,000 bonus this year. And they're gonna get 7,000 bonus next year and 7,000 bonus in the year after. That is a true

commitment to bringing healthcare to these islands.

- 0:40:40 The challenge, though, of opening the JFL North modular facility on St. Croix has been the most frustrating setback in our hurricane recovery efforts. The project has been plagued over the years by errors and omissions in funding, supply chain disruptions, contract disputes, COVID, and poor management oversight, amongst other issues. The Territorial Hospital Redevelopment Team and the management of Wanaflui Hospital understand what is at stake and realize that further delays frankly just cannot be tolerated by the community.
- 0:41:25 Senators, I know you've heard this before, before, and before again, but they have assured me, Mr. Koch and his team, that they will be at, with you and me, you and I, at the long-awaited ribbon cutting to open this facility this quarter. The redevelopment, though, of our other health facilities has not been nearly as problematic. The opening of JFL North will clear the way for the demolition of the existing hospital structure to commence later this year. The demolition of Charles Howard Medical Complex is on the way as we speak, with a contractor mobilizing this year as well. Likewise, the restoration of Charlotte Kimmelman Cancer Center has begun. Department of Health is also making progress on a new office for women, infants, and children of WIC at the New Hanson Memorial Complex on St. Thomas, and also in the town of Frederickstead and St. Croix.
- 0:42:22 But health care is not limited to physical health. We as a community cannot neglect those who suffer from mental health challenges as well. Providing adequate care for our neighbors with behavioral health issues is a hurdle we must overcome together. It's a hurdle that we will overcome together. I congratulate the Honorable Novel Francis Jr. and the other members of the 34th Legislature for passing the Behavioral Health Act. This comprehensive legislative measure, over eight years in the making, addresses the interdepartmental coordination of agencies and organizations providing services to individuals who suffer from these challenges. The Act also establishes policies and procedures by which persons with behavioral issues or disorders may receive services. This is a critical contribution to the continuum of mental health care that will result in better outcomes for those of our people with these behavioral health issues.
- 0:43:29 Now, we must continue to prioritize early and consistent treatment, so Virgin Islanders with serious mental illnesses may manage their condition, overcome their challenges, and receive the support they need. It is one thing to provide these facilities and everything else for health care, but creating Access for our community is just as important. More than 30 percent, conservatively, of Virgin Islanders do not have access to traditional health insurance. Our ability for low-income families to access Medicaid has been historically, has been hindered historically by the requirement for matching funds imposed by the federal government.
- 0:44:17 For over two decades, the Virgin Islands Federal Medicaid Assistance Percentage, or the FMAP, was 50 percent, and then it increased to 55 percent in 2010. This is the share, you see, of Medicaid funding that is provided by the federal government, which has long been lower for the territories than for the states. This means since then, the local government has been required to come up with \$0.45 out of every dollar expended for Medicaid benefits in the territory. Over the years, the governor of the Virgin Islands, its lobbyists and our congressional delegates have tirelessly advocated for an increase in the FMAP.
- 0:45:02 Today I am happy to announce that not only did we see a temporary increase in the FMAP to 89% from December 21 through March 23, but we have made history with the passing of the omnibus legislation that permanently increases the FMAP from 55 to 83% for Virgin Islands. After 20-something years, further adding to the historic significance of this landmark legislation. It was actually signed right here in the Virgin Islands while the president vacationed on the island of St. Roy.
- 0:45:53 The benefits of the increase in our FMOP are far-reaching. We not only increase the number of persons we serve from 32 to 37,000, but we added additional services to include personal care attendance services for seniors, telehealth services for all Medicaid members, and implemented a Medicaid buy-in for Medicare recipients. We are now exploring expanding Medicaid to cover more of the uninsured population. This is a tremendous accomplishment, and we would like to once again thank the Honorable Stacey Plaskett, her staff, and our Washington team for their incredible work. As we work to rebuild our health and hospital infrastructure and access, my administration has been focused on overall community wellness. We have launched the Our Best Life initiative to focus on improving the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of all Virgin Islanders. The initiative is a multi-agency collaboration with programs and activities for individuals of all ages in physical ability. Lest we forget the true aim of being health, having health and having health initiatives is to actually keep people out of the hospital. And the only way we can do this is through changing our eating habits, our behavior around exercise and being active in our lifestyle. As Virgin Islanders, we continue to adjust to the new normal of the post-pandemic world, we're increasingly finding ourselves meeting up in our favorite space outside. During the election, I noticed our people and their craving and desire to

- 0:47:45 do low-cost fun family activities. The Department of Sports, Parks, and Recreation is making tremendous progress in restoring our parks and recreational areas for the public's enjoyment. FEMA-funded repairs are in progress at numerous recreational facilities throughout the territory, with most expect to be completed this year. On St. Thomas repairs are being made to Emil Griffith, Alvin McBean, and Joseph Albain Parks. St. Croix repairs are being made to Pedro Cruz Ballpark, the Rudy Krieger Complex, and the party pavilion at Kramer's Parks are all being restored. Additionally, repairs will begin this year on Ezra Frederick's Lionel Smut Ridges, Michael J. Kerwin Terrace, Oppenheimer Beach, Winston Wells, and Reynolds-Jackson Complex Ballpark. The Pauly-Joseph Stadium in Frederickstead.
- 0:48:38 The Pauly-Joseph Stadium in Frederickstead is also nearing completion. As the dirt and debris are cleared from the front of this monolith, we can finally see the promise of a Pauly-Joseph Stadium. We have been hearing about for 12 years now. We will soon be submitting a final appropriation request to this body to upgrade several items in the project from the current base bin. After the many years spent in the effort to complete this renovation of this facility, I think we all would like to see a stadium we can be proud of. On the other side of town, the restoration of the Vincent Mason Pool has unfortunately encountered a significant challenge.
- 0:49:25 The original scope of work did not anticipate the need to replace the pilings and the pile foundation that holds the pool up. This change has doubled the cost of the project. It's become a \$5 million pool, and it requires some additional funding, but we are working to execute an amendment to the contract and restart that project this quarter. Drag racing, drag racing as we turn to St. Croix. We congratulate the Caribbean Drag Racing Association and its president, Arthur Hector, for getting racing back on track. Our attention is now focused on horse racing tracks.
- 0:50:13 Both tracks are in the coastal zone management permitting processing. Southland Gaming has submitted its permitting package on behalf of Clinton Phipps Racetrack, and VIGL's contractor has recently mobilized to begin the site work at the Randall Dock James Racetrack in St. Croix. And yes, cricket, lovely cricket. The lease has finally been finalized in the plot for the development of a pitch on St. Croix And \$2 million has been allotted for the development of that site. On St. Thomas, we have allocated startup monies to begin the work in Nazareth for the pitch and the stadium, which will follow. We are in the design phase for a complete sports park adjacent to the Ivana-Edoraken High School, which will boast fields for cricket and soccer, a gymnasium, which will double as a storm shelter.
- 0:51:12 Virgin Islanders, we are going to be spending a lot of healthy time outside. As I always say, luck is when opportunity meets preparedness. With the sweet promise of prosperity on the horizon, there is nothing more crucial to our individual success than education. The Virgin Islands can boast that it has a complete educational pipeline. Not only is the pipeline accessible, but it is also free. Free Head Start, free public pre-kindergarten, free K through 12, free college tuition, and free vocational training and apprenticeship programs. No other state, no other state can say this.
- 0:52:10 But the constant fixation we have had with building maintenance masks the true mission of our education in the Virgin Islands. See, education is about graduating students that are competent and capable. We must not lose sight of that mission. This past year, we implemented several interventions to assist our students in getting up to standard. However, to be truly successful, we must make a community-wide commitment to promoting academic achievement from cradle to the career. We must commit to encouraging literacy and numeracy at every opportunity.
- 0:52:50 See, we have many competent and well-trained teachers to lead us on this mission. Teachers who demonstrate the required commitment to the academic success of our student. In fact, we have two perfect examples with us this evening. District Teacher of the Year for the St. Thomas St. John District, Mr. Melvin Ledesma, a math teacher at Bertha C. Buschelt Middle School. And from the island of St. Croix, the District of St. Croix Teacher of the Year for St. Croix District, Ms. Astral Baptiste, a kindergarten teacher at the Pearl v. Larson 3K8.
- 0:53:55 If you happen to be in St. Croix, if you don't do anything else, you've got to go see Miss Batiste's classroom. Every single year is just phenomenal. Thank you, and thank all the teachers that contribute to our children's education. In our further commitment to our teachers, I keep living out of my speech, I know my staff is like, Like, what is he gonna say now? We have committed to bringing teachers starting salaries over the last three years to \$48,000. And I am not gonna stop until it's over \$50,000 because attracting and retaining our teachers has to be one of our main emphasis right here in the Virgin Islands. Our administration has placed emphasis on early childhood education from the beginning.
- 0:54:57 We have established public pre-kindergarten programs for five-year-olds in all but one of our public elementary schools. This year we will begin construction, restoration, and repair projects on eight Head Start centers. These projects represent an expenditure of over \$42 million. This is extra money now, it's not even in recovery anymore. Much like free college tuition, these are long-term investments whose impacts you may not be seeing immediately, but it will undoubtedly pay dividends for our community in the long runs. The Virgin Islands Department of Education, or BIDE, is at an unprecedented time where federal funds are available to execute much-needed improvements in public education,

territory-wide. The department will utilize \$138 million in American Rescue Plan allotments to reform, rebuild and rebrand public education.

- 0:55:55 The VIDE is committed to transforming today's learners into tomorrow's leaders. Reforming efforts include, and I think this is so huge, site-based management, which will give each principal two hundred and fifty thousand dollars each to develop plans that meet the needs of the students the faculty and the staff this will allow for flexibility in developing programs designed to support student achievement gaps because they differ from school to school with a different economic background and makeup of the neighborhoods they will be able to implement accelerated programs that enhance their student experiences and professional development for their teachers and monitors, to name a few. The VID is focused on improved student outcomes, hence the alignment of practices with the state, the district and the schools. This strategic planning allows synergy in practices and the maximization of our federal funds. Among the priorities in these plans is the need for behavioral support services, tutorial services.
- 0:57:12 After school activities and extended days, as well as summer teaching to decrease this learning loss we're experiencing. It is downright ridiculous that our teachers are working second jobs to meet their needs instead of earning that same money to enrich our children. We have the money. We are going to pay those teachers to stay in the classrooms. The transition back to in-person learning versus virtual has posed its own challenges. Last year, we saw school violence escalate as students transition back into the classrooms. We recognize that we need to protect the safety of the students, teachers, the monitors, as well as the administrative staff. We have supported student-led efforts to encourage healthy conflict resolution and positive behaviors.
- 0:58:10 Administrators are revamping how disciplinary actions are implemented by including wraparound service, behavioral services to address the underlying challenges these students are experiencing. We've identified ARPA funding to assess sites for safety and security concern. So whether it's electrical upgrades, security cameras, intercom systems, egress and ingress areas, emergency lighting, and a lot, a lot of training. We have to invest in it to address this issue. The scopes of work for these things are in preparation and will be ongoing starting this summer. Service contracts are being implemented to allow our maintenance workers to finally have access to be able to retrieve supplies so that their daily work is not delayed. Work order systems will be allowed for better management of human capital resources. In addition to rebranding efforts include launching a new website for the IDE, mobile applications, yeah we're gonna have an app too, an alert system to keep our stakeholders engaged and informed about the many initiatives and activities at our schools. Programs geared toward parental involvement are also being revived using this funding. Now more than ever we need to develop a generation of Virgin Islanders that are prepared for the competitive world we live in. We continue to establish and enrich the workforce development pipeline as we need 5,000 new workers to complete this recovery, not 5,000 people more who are in the system, 5,000 new people who don't exist right now in the Virgin Islands to come to our system. We will bring the resources to our people.
- 0:59:57 We've done it, but it's up to us individually to develop ourselves and take advantage of the opportunities, free opportunities. Having a safe, secure place to call home is vital to our peace of mind. So whether you are a first-time homeowner, a senior in your twilight years, or a person experiencing homelessness, affordable housing is a basic necessity. In the past four years, we have been on a mission to address our territory's housing crisis from a variety of angles. We are creating access to new housing across every income level. In a cooperative effort with the Virgin Islands Economic Development Authority and our local banks, we have established the VI Slice Moderate Income Home Ownership Program, designed to help fulfill a wide range of goals, including homes purchased for rehabilitation, new home construction, down payment and closing costs assistance, and secondary gap financing assistance.
- 1:01:03 This makes \$250,000 per person available on a grant never ever before even dreamed of, much less implemented in the Virgin Islands. In support of lowering home insurance, my recently passed legislation will allow VI domestic insurers to become members of the Federal Home Loan Bank of New York and help provide support to local banks, credit unions, and other financial institutions in support of this VI SLICE program.
- 1:01:38 Get you a slice, eh? Our federal partners at HUD have signaled bold steps to improve the quality of our existing housing and produce abundant housing through increased support to our VI Housing Authority. Last year, HUD provided \$46.2 million to help over 2,000 families living in public housing and 2,000 living in moderate income families utilizing housing choice vouchers. Additionally, VI has been allotted \$15 million in housing assistance payments. upwards of 800 landlords this year. The Housing Authority continues the implementation of a \$1 billion redevelopment plan, which will see the replacement of the entire 3,000 units of public housing, with half being new construction and half of the units to be comprehensively modernized over the last five years. Priority housing projects include 250 units at Walter I.M. Hodge Pavilion, where groundbreaking was held in June 22 and completion is anticipated in December 24.

- 1:02:42 84 state-of-the-art units in Dunu, which is 39% complete now. 98 units of senior housing at Stony Ground and 70 new units at Lubbid Harrigan, where demolition has been completed on the old units. VA is leveraging its federal funding to improve all our housing communities. As we work to address the housing crisis that has been building in the Virgin Islands For the last decade, we must act quickly and thoughtfully. We will do this by creating new, highly high-quality housing units and helping revitalize neighborhoods where we build them, ensuring everyone in our community will rise together.
- 1:03:20 But as we seek to identify additional housing and improve the general curb appeal of our community, it is impossible, it is impossible to continue ignoring the tremendous number of abandoned and derelict structures in our neighborhoods and towns. Buildings damaged by Hurricanes Hugo and Marilyn have encumbered additional damages in the aftermaths of Hurricane Irma and Maria. We have tried to incentivize property owners by dangling the proverbial carrot with tax incentives and whatnot, but we have simply not made enough progress the current approach.
- 1:04:05 The time has come for us to be more aggressive in restoring the previous beauty of our towns and neighborhoods. In the next few months, I will be sending legislation to the Senate that unifies and modernizes our historic preservation laws, as well as addresses abandoned and derelict properties. We haven't made it yet. We're going to get with the community, so we have your input when we do this, but we will be seeking to, and our aim is to put in place a process for properties to be placed into conservatorship by order of the court. These court order conservatorships would temporarily transfer control of the property to a public or non-profit entity for the purpose of restoring the property to functional viability.
- 1:05:07 Emphasis on temporary because we want our families to maintain these properties, but they simply don't have the resources or the will to do it. I look forward to your collaboration and cooperation on this historic effort in getting our towns back to where they need to be. Another important mission of this administration is restoring the safety, peace, and tranquility that our islands have traditionally enjoyed.
- 1:05:42 In my past addresses, I have called our community to action. If you see something, you answered. And the Virgin Islands Police Department has demonstrated on several occasions that this partnership yields and will continue to yield tangible results. Our officers are capable and hardworking. They did the police work and removed criminals from our community with your help.
- 1:06:13 Over the last four years, we have put in place a comprehensive effort to address crime and violence in our territory. We have invested significantly in public safety. VIPD has been unable to recruit and retain ideal manpower. We've been hearing this for 20 years. So we invested in technology to expand our capabilities·cameras, drones, shot powder system, a marine vessel. This past year, the Virgin Islands saw a lower rate of gun violence and a higher rate of arrests. All categories of serious crimes declined versus the prior year, and the territory recorded the lowest number of homicides in a decade and the second lowest in two decades.
- 1:07:02 I would like to thank. I would seriously and earnestly like the community to thank to Commissioner Ray Martinis and especially our men and women in blue who have served and protected the citizens of this territory. In the weeks to come, the IPPD will launch a police recruitment program. We're not giving up on manpower yet. We're offering a \$10,000 sign-on bonus to become a police officer. Not a marshal, not a corrections officer, not a VI port officer, but a VIPD officer. Ladies and gentlemen, if you have ever considered a career in law enforcement, I would say the time is now. Sign up, go through the academy, and serve your community. The position is noble and extremely rewarding. Just ask one of the many senators we have here who have served us in law enforcement.
- 1:08:11 But removing criminals from the street is not a long-term solution. We must be equally committed to their rehabilitation. The Bureau of Correction has launched its long-awaited offender reentry program. 90% of imprisoned individuals will return to our community at some point. forward, this administration will emphasize re-entry. We have identified federal funding to pursue transitional housing with the understanding that the transition from incarceration to re-entry into our community can be mentally and emotionally challenging. The goal is to execute a model that will include shelter, structure, and resources to facilitate a more successful You see, we all benefit from formerly incarcerated individuals transitioning to becoming productive and successful members of the community. After all, they are fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, and most especially neighbors. We do not want our people in and out of the prison system. This administration will continue to make investments in support and provide opportunities to reintegrate this population and discourage recidivism. We have established an entity to coordinate violent crime efforts through our Office of Gun Violence Prevention.
- 1:09:47 We have increased the capacity of the Virgin Islands Police Department to identify and apprehend criminals. We have put in place programs to rehabilitate prisoners and give them a chance at success as they re-enter society. But there is still so much work to do. We plan to approach this body to modify peace officer status so we can get more help from our

federal law enforcement officers. We also plan to approach this body to adopt a requirement for individuals to declare within 24 hours their intent to import firearms into the territory. That's before they get on the plane. We believe that this is a better way to distinguish legitimate firearm owners from those smuggling weapons for nefarious purposes. We also want to take a closer examination of our Youth Rehabilitation Center.

- 1:10:36 This is currently operated by the Department of Human Services. This institution is no longer effective in its conduct of its mandate. Children remanded to YRC typically are not detained there long enough to avail themselves of meaningful rehabilitation services. It has really just become an expensive babysitting service for troubled youth. As my administration enters its second term, we will be exploring alternative approaches to addressing juvenile delinquency.
- 1:11:07 We want peace in our communities. We want to enjoy our paradise and to invite guests to do the same, particularly after years of COVID restrictions. Our culture also demands that we come together and do so often. We want our carnivals and parades and our concerts violence-free. I am aware that we will only achieve this mission through prevention and engaging those at most at risk in our community. The Workforce Development Board, in partnership with the executive branch agencies and Align is executing the Donnan Project model in the U.S. Virgin Islands.
- 1:11:52 The model focuses on training and employment opportunities for at-risk young adults. Providing training and employment can positively change the course of someone's life forever. We are seeking partnerships from the private sector to support this program. We invite our local businesses to help change lives by partnering with us. The judiciary in the Virgin Islands remains the anchor of the criminal justice system. I thank the Honorable Judges for their work on behalf of the people of this territory. While we recognize that the delays that the pandemic forced on our courts, we are cognizant of the constitutional right to a speedy trial. As the great orator Martin Luther King Jr. stated, justice too long delayed is justice denied. This extends to our citizens who have cases languishing in courts, whether criminal or civil.
- 1:12:50 It is important that these cases move forward so that our people can have their matters heard and resolved in a timely fashion. We are pledging our cooperation and our full support to the judiciary in this effort. Finally this evening · y'all like finally, huh? this evening, I must warn of some newly emerging challenges on the horizon. The economy continues to improve as we navigate out of the pandemic. However, the territory is sailing into some very, very strong headwinds. The economists at the World Bank are warning that global growth has slowed to the extent that a global economy is perilously close to falling into a recession. Most regions are seeing inflation rise higher than it has in several decades, triggering a cost-of-living crisis.
- 1:13:48 Financial conditions are tightening across the globe, and there is widespread shortage of skilled workers, thereby creating issues for a variety of industries reliant on those workers. Nationally, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce is predicting at least a mild recession to affect the country sometime later this year, caused by falling consumer and business spending and rising interest rates. But we don't need economists to tell us that, right? We feel it every day at the gas pump and certainly in the grocery store. Since the beginning of 2020, inflation has increased markedly in the territory, increasing 7.1% in 2020, 5.7% in 2021, and another 7% in 2022. There is, however, some reason for optimism, as the monetary policy of the Federal Reserve is having the intended effect of slowing the growth of inflation nationally, and hopefully we will soon see some of that benefit locally. We cannot predict with certainty what 2023 holds for the global economy, So we must continue to build our economic resilience for what is to come. So while we count our blessing, we must remain ever vigilant that hard times are inevitable, and we must be prepared.
- 1:15:15 Locally, our government has implemented our own policy of fiscal stimulus to increase spending power of Virgin Islanders, particularly those with fixed incomes, and help them keep pace with this massive inflation. Last year, with the help of our friends in the Legislature, we provided \$40 million in direct stimulus in the form of outstanding retroactive wages owed to the employees and retirees of the government of the Virgin Islands. the government's current obligation for repayment of those retroactive wages which go back 40 years is still 135 million now i made a promise last year that this administration will pay at least \$25 million every year, and we have budgeted another \$25 million for this year to be paid out before October 1st. I know some people thought it was an election ploy, but we're serious about our people.
- 1:16:29 We were also able to distribute the statutorily mandated bonuses for public sector retirees 60 and older for fiscal years 2018 through 2022, before the end of last year. In all over 7,500 retirees benefited from the distribution. I want to congratulate the Honorable Donna Fred Gregory for successfully championing this cause and getting us full of power. And I want people to recognize that these are not easy things to do. I mean, we took this money out of general fund, and the Senate President, let's say, took me to task to make sure we get it done.
- 1:17:15 Because we recognize the tremendous hardship that the current inflation has put on everyone, but especially our seniors and our people with disabilities who are mostly on fixed incomes. I mean, we were able to provide, thank God, if you have the money, we were able to provide direct financial aid in the form of a \$500 cash stipend to 19,269 Social Security

beneficiaries. We still got another 1,700 checks. I guess people don't need the money. Now, I know the rollout of this program proved extremely challenging, but the public interest and response demonstrated that it was severely needed.

1:18:07 When you've seen our seniors, 70, 80 years old, willing to go out and stand in line in the hot sun, you know they need this money. And they not only needed it, but they didn't take this check and put it in the savings. They needed it for basic everyday needs. All that money came right back into the economy. It was a timely distribution as we entered the holiday season so that those who received them could at least provide something for them, a little bit for their family. We didn't stop there. We paid out \$23.5 million in premium pay to private sector and public sector employees that kept our economy moving during the pandemic. This local stimulus was supplemented by almost another \$35 million in federal funding disbursed through the Federal Pandemic Emergency Assistance Fund, Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer, and SNAP Emergency Allotments. Armed with this influx of cash that continues to be distributed to the people and bolstered by the numerous programs and projects this administration has championed, I am confident that the territory is prepared for whatever economic challenges that lie ahead.

1:19:36 So, how can I say we are full of promise? How can I make such a bold pronouncement? Well, there are help wanted signs everywhere. And jobs for every qualified Virgin Islander who really wants one. We are offering free college education and free job training in every area you can think of. We have strong economic development planning in place. We are receiving regional and national recognition for our post-COVID economy.

1:20:13 Billions of dollars are pouring into and invested in our infrastructure. Yes, there remains much work to be done, but we can get it done if we do it together. I stand here willing, ready, and able to put in the work, but I need your help. So friends and colleagues and Virgin Islanders, tonight I ask, will you join me in moving more people out of poverty? Will you join me in championing a healthier community? Will you join me in pursuing a safe and secure community where young men and women live as neighbors and not as enemies?

1:21:02 Will you join me in building a community that truly values education? Will you join me in helping our young people achieve their dreams of home ownership? Will you join me in the pursuit of a Virgin Islands that we can all be proud of? I ask these questions because I know that if we are unified in our approach to confronting problems and implementing solutions, we will achieve lasting success in service to our people and realize the full promise of these islands we call home.

1:21:42 In the words of the late Governor Alexander Farrelly, we owe it to ourselves to capture and preserve for posterity those things which are the essence of what we are and who we hope to be. Virgin Islanders, join me as we embark on this journey. God bless you. God bless the Virgin Islands. Love you. Thank you.

1:22:42 as well as the lieutenant governor departs the chamber. Thank you very much, Governor. Round of applause again for the governor. Are we good? You may be seated.

1:24:12 Miss Roach, Miss Brown, you may depart. I want to recognize the presence of Senator Fonseca for the record.

1:25:01 Thank you. I extend a thank you to the Office of the Executive Director, Central Staff, and all who worked tirelessly to prepare the Legislature for hosting tonight's State of the Territory Address. My thanks as well to the Office of the Governor for their support. Finally, I'd also like to thank our Public Affairs team and our media partners for their efforts to ensure that tonight's proceeding address is accessible to the public. session of January 9, 2023, and reconvene on January 23, 2023. Before I adjourn, again, I want to recognize the presence of the Chief Justice and all of the judiciary. Thank you for being here this evening, and thank you for the work that you continue to do on behalf of the people of the First and the Hours. We appreciate you. The session of January 9th, 2023 reconvene on January 23rd, 2023 is hereby adjourned.

1:26:04 Good night, God bless. Thank you. We'll be right back. [3 such phrases repeated 8 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

1:29:56 We'll be right back. Thank you. [2 such phrases repeated 21 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

1:40:26 I'm Africa Harrigan for Legit TV co-hosting tonight is Jamal Potter and right now joining us is our Senate President of the 35th Legislature, Nouvelle Francis. How are you tonight? Good evening, Ms. Harrigan. I'm fine, thank you. How are you? Wonderful. So what were your thoughts on the governor's speech?

1:40:56 I thought that the governor delivered a comprehensive speech in regard to the state of the territory. Of course, he talked about how promising it looks, and, you know, I agree with him that there's many opportunities that's available to Virgin Islanders, and, you know, I'm hoping to, as he has indicated, to work along with the administration. The 35th legislature is committed to doing their part, again, to work along with the administration and to delegate to Congress to really move

the issue, move the needle on some of the issues that he certainly brought to our attention and we are aware of as well.

1:41:30 The governor spoke about the modernization of the property tax system, stabilizing the pension system, and he also talked about revenue increases in terms of the corporate income taxes as well as the general fund monies as well. Although the governor shared several different areas where there was an economic boost, are there other areas that can be addressed? I certainly think that there are other areas. I was a little taken back that he didn't mention anything about the Lime Tree Bay or Port Hamilton, because obviously that is a concern of individuals, whether or not we're at the stage that we're going to be opening the Port Hamilton, which will be another revenue source, or if, in fact, we have to do away with moving in that direction. But it's evident, and I totally agree, that we can't continue to put all our eggs in one basket, and we have to diversify our portfolio. So I'm in agreement in terms of some of the revenue-generating initiative that you intend to undertake moving forward one of the things that the governor mentioned was the catalyst fund gap financing initiative an initiative in which five million dollars was made available and i think that's a project that you coordinated with him with correct correct yes and pretty much him as well as the rt park okay fantastic and basically that money is going towards small business development uh can you expand on that do you think that additional monies will be added over the years yeah the intent was to actually look at the cdbg fund then there's 30 million dollars earmark i heard that that 30 million dollars have been reduced to 25 million dollars and i'm okay with that but there's some additional funding that will be utilized for the gap financing and catalyst fund obviously i think that the amount the five million dollars have already been depleted i know that um you know the rt park have already committed um the initial 5 million dollars and they're ready willing and able to to really expend the additional 30 million dollars or 25 million dollars whichever it is that that's remaining is there anything in his speech that he did not mention tonight that you would have liked him to mention um no i i think

1:43:32 that i like the fact that we're finally at the juncture as he has committed to um to us uh to get the juan francisco louis jfl north up and running i think that the public especially in the district of st croix patiently awaiting that opening um certainly the some of the road repairs that you have spoken about we have worked along with the administration for 40 million dollars to assist with road repair territory-wide the mahogany road has been really um deplorable in deplorable condition for quite some time and i'm happy to hear that the intent to really get that road repair um during you know this year i look forward to that thank you so much senator jamal yes good Good night, others.

1:44:43 So what would you like to talk about? You hearing me? You hearing me? Good night.

1:45:11 This is Jamal Potter for Legit TV, and we are speaking with the Vice President of the 35th Legislature, Marvin Blyden. How are you today, sir? I'm great, great. Thank you for having me do this most important interview, Mr. Potter. Yes, and what were your thoughts on the governor's state of the territory address today? Well, first of all, it was a very optimistic speech. I believe that we have a mandate as senators, especially in the 35th legislature, and the executive branch alike. Why is it that? From the time we started the church services before we were sworn in, the preacher and the clergy spoke to working together. They spoke about ceasing the moment. And the governor actually started off his speech by saying, the timing is everything.

1:46:00 And he spoke about tremendous opportunities, especially when it comes to the Department of Education with the amount of federal funding that they have available to them. And he also spoke in respect to housing and the SLICE program. And I do agree with him 100%. Why? Because, as he stated, there have never been a time in our history that we have had this much federal funds available for the people. In respect to the SLICE program, you know, I would like to see them make some changes in respect to not following the HUD mandates because when they have done that, they have eliminated a certain amount of people and it's a local program. So I believe it should be totally different from the HUD guidelines and regulations to assist as many of our people as possible. possible he also spoke to the 40 million dollars in not water line repairs but water line extension and i've been championing that cost for the last three four years the money is there we need to make it happen because what it does it also assists with our housing stock why because it will drive down the cost of construction and expand and create more revenues for the water and power authority at the same time so i'm looking forward to working with the executive branch and my colleague in that respect to assure that we really do seize the moment and take advantage of the opportunity that's before us because like i stated before also what all b and them did back in the days i would like to see us repeat that because this is the time this is our moment and we must work on behalf of our people yes and i know one thing that the governor spoke about today was infrastructure being that you are on the committee of housing transportation telecommunications

1:47:47 yes uh what do you feel should be done in that area for improvement in respect to our infrastructure that is the backbone of our economy in terms of everything and all aspects of our economy and what needs to be done honestly we need to streamline processes we need to work together and come up with plans and execute those plans because we have a lot of um projects online but But in terms of execution, we need to see execution. And I believe middle management have a

critical role to play, because once our middle management is on point, everything flows accordingly. So I believe that, like I said, we need to plan accordingly, meet, and execute. And I believe that will go far away in terms of actually bringing more revenue for our people. Yes. And was there anything in the governor's speech today that you feel that he did not properly address? Well, honestly, he only have a certain amount of time. And there are several areas that he could have expung more on. In my opinion, I'm housing all day and night.

1:48:52 I believe he could have expung more on our housing crisis, our housing issues, and also mental illness, and our seniors. He could have expung more on that. But he touched many areas, and he touched some of those areas also. But nonetheless, I think with a pretty good speech on it, Like I said, I was very optimistic, in my opinion. All right. All right. Africa, back to you. Thank you so much. Thank you. Good job. Thank you Jamal, joining me is our Legislative Secretary, Senator Carla Joseph, how are you tonight?

1:50:00 I am thankful, really excited about the state of our territory this evening. What did you think about the governor's speech? I thought the governor's speech, his tone was very optimistic and robust and energized as usual. And I was really grateful to hear a lot of the good work that has been done. And what he is willing to do is again work with the 35th legislature of the Virgin Islands and work with all of us in general to move our islands forward.

1:50:36 One of the things that the governor mentioned in his speech was the housing redevelopment plan in which he's infusing \$1 billion into rebuilding the housing public system. Included in that is the 3,000 public units and making the playground and making it really beautiful for the housing communities. What are your thoughts on that? Well, I know most of that funding is coming from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban development and they have given a significant sums of money to the housing choice voucher program formerly known as the Section A program I do have legislation to really open up the and even out the playing field for our housing residents especially those in participating in the housing choice voucher programs to even that because we have some levels of discrimination that they are encountering and which is preventing them from actually getting into a home and which is critical because everyone knows the home is where your heart is and home is a sanctuary so we really want to see a lot of our residents go into homes and I want to transition into another key component that it is important to families and to our community is our workforce development assuring that we are preparing our residents and our young people and even those who are in the workforce who wants to transition into a different career path into that career path. He mentioned 5,000 workers as needed that is where the main thrust is to help rebuild restart and continue our trajectory into this century is to build that workforce. And I completely agree Is there anything that the governor did not mention tonight that you would have liked him to mention?

1:52:26 Again, I must state that he mentioned nothing about agriculture. And today we just passed the agriculture plan and provided funding for this most vital component to help us to have a level of food security. We want to be able to assure that we are able to feed ourselves because we have so much rising costs, and we import practically 90% and above of our food. So we want to really march to it, that we are doing that. And I want to add before I end, he mentioned nothing for our elder populations and the fact that we really don't have a level of continuum of care here. We don't have any assisted living nursing facilities that are up and running and follow regulations, and I'm looking into legislation for that, nor do we have any skilled nursing facility home. We have what I call a silver tsunami on a way here in the Virgin Islands with a lot of aging population and a lot of our aging elders who need to be treated with a level of dignity because they have worked tirelessly to get all of us here. And when they are in their twilight age, he mentioned peace, they need to enjoy some peace in their community and in their homes and be treated with a level of dignity. Thank you so much, Senator, for this interview, back to you, Jamal.

1:53:58 Yes, we are, yes, we are, yes, we are, yes, we are, yes we are here with senator kennett getzins how are you today sir i am blessed and yourself i'm good okay um how did you feel about the governor's speech today i'm pleased with uh much of the information imparted on us this evening of course um there were maybe uh one or two crucial synchro in matters that I wanted to hear a bit more about which were the JFL North firm opening date and I wanted to hear something on the refinery but we didn't hear anything much on the refinery however much of what was imparted this evening I was moved by the statements and in the Governor's speech today, he spoke a lot about the resurgence of tourism, particularly cruise ship arrivals on the island of St. Croix. Now, you are a senator from St. Croix. How are you feeling about these cruise ship arrivals? Well, I'm happy about these cruise ship arrivals. And last year, when we attended the Sea Trade Conference, we were told that we will see three times the amount of passengers coming to the island of St. Croix. Now, one of the things that I would like to see us do is address our dilapidated downtown areas. And my office have put things in motion to talk with stakeholders to see how we can address this. So I was also

1:56:13 happy to hear the governor talk about his plans of addressing the dilapidated buildings in the downtown area. So I'm looking forward to working with the meeting and working with the administration in this matter, because the downtown of Frederick said especially really needs some attention. And I think that it has been too long neglected. And was there

anything in the governor's speech today that you feel he did not address? Well, something else that I would have liked to hear a little more about and I will be reaching out to the governor's office and the office of management and budget is the premium pay to especially our first responders. We still have a number of people in a category that did not receive the premium pay and that premium pay was specific for those individuals who cannot perform their work from home. And we know for sure that our law enforcement officers, our EMTs, and our doctors and nurses could not perform their functions from home, and especially those at the hospital. When we saw places like even a firehouse or a police substation closing down and they're moving operations to another area at our hospitals our doctors nurses technicians etc could not um that those areas were not shut down so again i'm saying that we have to take care of those who took care of us during this pandemic so i'm looking forward to having a further conversation with them i know that the letters according to the omb director was sent out for the justification of those making over \$70,000 but I'm eager to know what's

1:58:10 the status of those payments all right well thank you senator back to you Africa thank you so much thank you so much Jamal coming up you're Donna a Fred Gregory. How are you today? Wonderful. We're just awaiting your mic. It's on its way. How are you tonight? I am wonderful. Well what did you think about the governor's speech? I think the governor's speech was big on promise and you know We have a lot to look forward to as Virgin Islanders, but I believe that we really need to continue to focus on our healthcare, education, our economy. And I'd like to just start out with the healthcare. I think that there was a lot of conversation, I heard a lot of conversation, rather, around healthcare infrastructure, but what is very important to me is we do have a lot of Virgin Islanders that are sick. And while we are rebuilding our healthcare system, it is important that we establish relationships with clinics and facilities outside of the territory so we can provide an opportunity for our citizens who are not well to go to the mainland and have those types of partnerships so they can go to the mainland for services. I think that is mission critical to improving our healthcare. We know that we are challenged with attracting doctors, so it's important that we really look at the specialty areas where the doctors are not here in the territory and establish relationships outside of the territory with clinics and hospitals so we can really provide services to our people. And we could even really consider with our upper money to provide subsidies as they travel off the territory.

2:00:13 we also on education I think that before you move on to education okay I wanted to ask you I mean so he in terms of health care like you mentioned he did talk about it but one of the things that he mentioned was a comprehensive legislative measure in terms of having a lot more services provided to people suffering from mental health do you think that is the first step in the right direction or where would you like to see this comprehensive measure go? Okay, well, we, the 34th legislature passed the Comprehensive Behavioral Health Bill. So that's definitely a win-win. Now is the implementation. It's important that we, well, the administration really focuses on the implementation of the Comprehensive Behavioral Health Bill. So that's also going to, of course, require funding, and it requires support, and it requires personnel. So, again, that's definitely a win-win and an upbeat, but now it's time for implementation.

2:01:11 That bill was recently signed, so it's implementation time. And just like you mentioned, you know, being able to coordinate with people nationally to make services even more available to them. Was there anything in the governor's speech that he didn't mention that you would have liked him to talk about tonight? Yes, and I basically just mentioned it to you around the health care and how we're going to make sure that there's services to our people. In addition to the fact that around the education component, you heard that there's a lot of funding available for education. But I didn't really hear, so how are we going to ensure that we are going to see student achievement for our children? The other thing that was very much missing is, I remember in his previous State of the Territory in 2022, he talked about a Commission on Aging and the implementation of SAIM. I did not hear anything about the Commission on Aging. So I'm looking forward to having a conversation with him around, so what are we doing for the elderly?

2:02:11 His conversation was definitely short on how are we addressing the needs of our elderly in the Virgin Islands. So that's something that we really need to focus on as we work in the 34th, 5th legislature as well. Thank you so much, Senator. Back to you, Jamal. Thank you. Yes, good night, this is Jamal Potter and we are now speaking to the Delegates of Congress, Ms. Stacy Plaskett. How are you tonight? I'm well. How are you doing?

2:02:49 I'm good. How are you? Great. What were your thoughts on the governor's speech tonight? Well, I was appreciative of how concise it was and it really outlined, I think, and highlighted the major points that the governor had to make with regard to the accomplishments of his administration in its first term, as well as his ideas and thoughts on what his priorities were for his next term and for the upcoming year. I was really glad that it very precisely stated what he felt his administration would be accomplishing moving forward. One of the things that the governor did speak about today, the Virgin Islands is heavily dependent on tourism. is one thing he spoke about the passage of the medicinal marijuana I know this has probably been a very controversial topic but how do you feel this will you know stim you stimulate growth

in the Virgin Islands sure well I'm happy to see what the legislature as well as the governor puts forward of course in my office as a federal office there's not much input that our office would give presently of course you know marijuana still has a federal designation as being illegal there are those of us that are looking at the decriminalization of marijuana I was a sponsor of one of the impediments that we're going to see with this commercialization of marijuana which is safe banking that because this is seen at a federal level as an illegal activity individuals who make large sums of money and this have not been able to bank in FDIC banks and so myself and other there are quite a number of members of Congress on both sides of the aisle that are really trying to create safe banking laws that would allow individuals to get that done. And do you feel that there is anything particularly in you know as your office can do to facilitate anything that the governor is trying

2:04:48 to pursue in terms of what I guess just in terms of just general improvements well I mean most of the activity that the governor talked about in terms of rebuilding of roads health care the funding to the schools the 150 million that he was going to be putting towards the schools for teachers to be able to implement most of those things come through federal funding that our office has been hard fought to provide, whether it's in the FMAP in changing the Medicaid funding that he talked about, making that permanent. Even the funding that was provided for individuals so that they could have the retroactive pay that had long been standing came through the earned income and tax credit being made permanent, as well as having it reimbursable. That added 20 million dollars additionally 234 million dollars that are going to the schools from federal funding for arpa the forgiveness of our disaster loans of 300 million so i can go on and on our office my work is really to make ensure that we have the resources i.e finances to be able to get that done and so many of the things that the governor talked about i'm really happy whether it's in wapa and really diversifying our energy and making it more affordable as well as some other things that we really want to pivot to ensuring that the biden administration actually obligates and releases that funding so that virgin islanders can feel it on the ground thank you very much for your time delegate back to you africa okay who's next joining me today is our senator angel vocalist jr and of course he is our at-large senator how are you today good evening africa i'm doing very good what did you think about the governor's speech i think it was nothing short of exceptional i think he covered a lot of key basic areas in our economy that we are concerned about you know education infrastructure waterline extensions and so forth so even healthcare so i'm really looking forward to see what else is in store and collaborating with him through the legislative branch

2:07:01 in terms of one of the things that she mentioned he did talk about road repairs and one of his quotes that he said was prosperity abundant for all and not just for some and when he mentioned that he was actually referring to road repairs road repairs on st croix road repairs on st thomas but are you satisfied with the road repairs on st john there have been some considerable advancements on road repairs throughout the territory to include st john and i believe that the work is not finished as yet and that there is more to do uh he did not touch on the rail guards which i think throughout the territory we're seeing a lot of our rail guards need to be replaced i'm hoping that that is part of the plan when we talk about the infrastructure as well but for st john i think there is some work to be done but it's it's over 70 percent of work has already been done i do like that um that you didn't mention the rail guards because rail guards are a major safety that's right you know implementation there in terms of the health care system he talked about the legislative the comprehensive legislative measure in which all of you know in agencies within the government and entities are collaborating to ensure that there are more services available for those suffering with mentally ill issues what do you think about that I think that is something that has long plagued our society and with the passing of the behavioral health bill which was passed in the 34th legislature I think that we're going to see some advancement in that area. Still, it is the groundwork foundation of it. There's a lot more to do, but I'm looking forward to seeing how we can collaborate with the executive branch in that endeavor.

2:08:41 Sorry, is there anything in the governor's speech that he did not mention tonight that you would have liked him to mention? I would have liked him to mention Myra Keaton Clinic on St. John in addition to waterline extensions to agriculture lands. If we're going to have a serious conversation about agriculture and food sustainability and food security here in the Virgin Islands. We need to force our water and power authority to extend waterline extension to agricultural lands so that we can see the benefits of that.

2:09:09 Thank you, Senator. Back to you, Jamal. Thank you. good night and we are here with senator diane capehart how are you tonight senator i'm doing well thank you for asking how did you feel about the governor's speech today i was motivated by the governor's speech. The governor talked about an array of challenges that we had within the last four years, and I think he addressed all of them. You know, we all know that he can't talk about everything, like the roofing program, which is a need on St. Croix, you know, just even programs for the veterans. But these are things that I know that I can work with this administration on some of these challenges.

- 2:10:12 And the governor has spoken specifically about tourism. We know St. Croix is experiencing a sort of renaissance right now. The Hotel and the Key is being redeveloped, the area that was the Hotel and the Key. How do you feel that is going to stimulate growth in St. Croix as well as Christians did? I think that is going to be a great revitalization project for the town of Christianstead with King Christian and the other hotels with those hotels being open and and renovated it's going to stimulate the economy in Christianstead and so I'm very excited about that you know tourism has increased as the governor said to 116 percent that is great so I'm excited you know I went to school and studied hospitality. So this is my area. I'm excited where, you know, talking about job creation for individuals who want to get into culinary arts, you know, front desk, you know, administrative. I'm excited because, you know, tourism is a good product for the Virgin Island. it doesn't emit any kind of pollutants so I'm happy I'm very happy yes and you were already speaking about some of the items that you felt that the governor did not speak about but can you elaborate a little bit more on what you feel he didn't what you would have liked to him well well you know he did talk about the 12 billion dollars in recovery funds from Irma and Maria So I would just be watching keenly to see how the government spends that money.
- 2:12:05 And that's why I talked about the roofing program for particularly St. Croix. So as I said, I'm looking forward to working with the governor as I've been reelected into this 35th legislature. And it's important to have that partnership with the governor. So I look forward to working on some of these recovery projects because I'm the vice chair of that committee for infrastructure and recovery. All right, thank you so very much for your time. Africa, back to you. Thank you. So we have joining us is Senator Milton E. Potter, and this is your second term with us.
- 2:12:52 Yes. How are you doing tonight? excellent africa how are you doing today i'm doing fantastic so what were your thoughts on the governor's speech i thought the governor gave a great speech i mean as far as state of the territory addresses go i hit all of the major points it was positive it was upbeat it was optimistic um so and that is what you want to convey um for one of these state of the territory addresses it was definitely upbeat and optimistic he started out saying he's excited yes So, based on the education system, the Virgin Islands Department of Education is currently focused on student outcomes and performance, and basically they want to align it with national standards.
- 2:13:38 Yes. What do you think about the progress so far? Education is one of my biggest concerns, and it has been for a while. have been through a lot of challenges as a result of the hurricanes hurricane recovery COVID our children have lost a lot of learning time which has an impact on the foundation laying the foundation it has an impact on their future i think we're gonna if we aren't intentional and deliberate in terms of developing strategies to impact the learning loss that our children have experienced we're going to pay a tall price for that i would have liked for the governor to elaborate a little more on the specific strategies that his educational leaders are taking to bridge that learning loss gap in terms of education we're going to move into the house and redevelopment plan in which a million dollar of one billion dollars was actually set aside for that project and pretty much what it's going to be is community building have over 3 000 public units have playgrounds what do you think about that i like it i like the idea of us not having these big monstrosities of us developing neighborhoods neighborhoods that are safe we are experiencing a serious affordable housing crisis in our community so that would really go a long way towards providing residents of this territory with clean safe affordable housing units we have a shortage here in our community so i like that i like the direction we're going with regards to
- 2:15:24 affordable housing fantastic in terms of tourism the governor spoke about the redevelopment of crown bay and frederickstead and even of surveys having additional shops and restaurants there Do you think that with these developments, once they come into fruition, will it make the Virgin Islands the number one premier destination? I think so. I mean, we're well on track to being the number one destination right now. He mentioned that a commissioner received numerous awards and the Virgin Islands has been highlighted during this COVID and post-COVID for what we have been doing in the area of tourism.
- 2:16:02 but I am, I don't want to be through any sort of cold water on this, but I'm concerned about when is it going to be too much. There might be room for growth, but we have to at least at some point have in our minds when does it start to be diminishing returns, you know, as far as tourism and growth is concerned. And very quickly, I want to ask you this question. Was there anything in his speech that he did not mention tonight? I would have liked, and it might be a small thing, but it's a big thing too. I would have liked he mentioned the Pauly Joseph Stadium and some of the recreational facilities that were being built.
- 2:16:41 I am still a little uncertain about what is happening with the Lionel Roberts Stadium. It's been there, it's been sitting. We haven't heard a lot about where we're going with that. I would have liked for him to mention something about that. That has been a mainstay in this community for a long time. So, I would have liked if you said that. Thank you so much, Senator. You're welcome. Back to you, Jamal. Yeah, yeah, definitely.

- 2:17:08 Definitely. I'm sorry. Huh? That's good. Good night. We are speaking with Senator Ray Fonseca. How are you tonight, sir? A fine blessing.
- 2:17:35 Yes. What are your thoughts on the governor's speech tonight? Well, you know, I listened attentively to the governor's blueprint and his outline for the people of the Virgin Islands and his second administration. And I can see where I can, you know, support a lot of his initiatives, you know, based on my commitment to serve the people of the Virgin Islands and the governor's efforts. I have to say I'm a little bit impressed with how the presentation was, the amount of areas that we have been showing progress. You know, he was fair in his assessment. There are certain areas that we still need to improve upon, like, for example, the WAPA issue. But the WAPA issue, I think, can be, you know, further breaking down into the vital issue with that propane plant. We all know that has been a problem. And, of course, with the education, you know, he is showing that the administration is very committed to the education. because, as you know, some of our kids have been testing below the national levels. So overall, I would say I'm pretty much impressed. One thing that the governor did speak about today, inflation is a rising issue in just about every part of the world right now. What do you think should be done to...
- 2:19:07 Yes, inflation. Okay, you know, there's several things that I want to see happen with inflation. First of all, let's start with the retirees. You know, I think that our pension system, the GRS system, should pay a cost of living allowance. Like, for example, Social Security in this year, I think they increased their payments about 8.7 percent. But based on the cost of bread, of eggs, of milk, of, you know, orange juice in the Virgin Islands, we need to make sure that our retirees are getting a cost of living increase. Because if you're on a fixed income and the prices are rising, you know, it's trouble. Because basically you're getting poorer and poorer every year. In addition to that, with the inflation, if I may, we need to control the prices of gasoline. I think we need to do a little bit better job with prices in the Virgin Islands. It just seems like prices are going up just too rapidly. Well, Senator, thank you for your time. Africa, back to you. Yes, thank you.
- 2:20:27 Joining us right now is Senator Franklin Johnson. how are you tonight good evening i'm doing very fine and he just shared with me that when he used her name franklin his mother used to beat him can't tell you a secret at all what did you think about the governor's speech the governor was real upbeat and and a lot of promises and and i i as a politician you don't promise people people want to hear concise and precise time of when things are going to happen when they're going to get the action and see things happening so a lot of times you keep saying he promised and you know promise is a comfort to a fool people want to see this place moving you know but he was very upbeat one of the things that you know he spoke about was the economy the modernization of the property tax system the stabilization of the pension system and of course the increased revenues for the general fund and the corporate income taxes but are there other areas that needs to be addressed in order to further stabilize our economy most definitely i didn't hear anything about agriculture and food security is a serious situation for this territory as you know all of our food some 98 percent of it comes in by boat and then trucking if they happen to be a shutdown in the mainland with the trucking the shipping we're in a bad position and and we need to make sure we really invest in stabilizing our food we can really cut down and bring in a lot of food that's coming in a lot of vegetables our tomatoes or cucumber or zucchini or squash a lot of these stuff can be planted right here our eggs earlier today we spoke about that the price of eggs we can do some chicken farm here that's going to cut that cost greatly so that's an area that i think will boost our economy if we are serious back in those days to talk about the vagina especially seeing caribbean the best food basket of this territory we gotta go back to that we gotta make sure that we could feed ourselves and then start expanding to other Caribbean islands. One of the things that he did mention was
- 2:22:25 the Virgin Islands Department of Education, how they're basing student progress on student outcomes and having their curriculum in alignment with the national standards. What are your thoughts on that? It's all good to hear that but you first have to make sure that the infrastructure is suitable for learning. Today there was a set of teachers out there and they gave me some of their complaints and there are simple things that can be fixed. You're talking about rodents, you're talking about pesticides inside our school. We have to make sure that the environment that our students go to learning is conducive for learning. All of that other stuff is good to hear. But if the environment is not conducive for learning, then what happens? We end up with that loss of our children getting that opportunity to learn because there's so much other distraction. And in terms of that, he also spoke about the housing redevelopment plan, \$1 billion is being infused into that, and it will be over a development of over 3,000 public housing units, what are your thoughts on that?
- 2:23:24 And that's a plus, but what he didn't speak about is our folks that are living with these blue roofs. We are in our seventh year after the hurricane, and that program, that Envision program is a stalemate, it's not moving, and I go to people homes on a regular base, I see people with washpan, they still got washpan around here catching water. That program need to really pay attention to make sure that we can fix our people's homes and most of the people that are living in those homes are seniors we cannot continue saying that we care about our people we care about our seniors but these are the kind of

conditions we have our people and very quickly was there anything in his speech that he did not mention tonight well besides agriculture he was very vague on the prison and i i mean i i did my best trying to make sure that we can get the right person to run the facility and I still want to shoot in for that. There's a lot more to be said about our infrastructure. He spoke about roads. Roads are not the only thing. We have a lot of government buildings that are deplorable so I hope that piece of legislation will address the government building them too because the Interior Department gave us some 25 million dollars. The government spent about 10. There's the next 15 million sitting there and now we're trying to find other avenues of saying that we're going to deal with this historic reservation no let's use that grant let's find ways to make those grants easier accessible to our people because that money is sitting there thank you so much senator thank you very much next time when i give you a story don't give it up okay back to you jamal You are here with Senator Alma Francis Heiliger, how are you tonight?

2:25:04 Good evening, good evening. Yes, how did you feel about the governor's speech tonight? Well, I think the governor's speech was somewhat fluffy but optimistic. I think he did his very best in trying to share with the people where he has gone over the last four years and potentially where he would like to see the virgin islands to go i've actually asked this question already today but um infrastructure is a highly debated topic how do you feel that should be improved in terms well the infrastructure of our territory is the basically one of the backbones as to how we're going to progress as a people and whether you're dealing with making sure the roads, whether you're dealing with housing, whether you're dealing with the infrastructure across the board of making sure that even with the education of our people, all of these are major parts as to the future or the direction we're gonna go as a people. And I think we have to really focus on them as individual elements in order to bring about the results that we need. One of the things that I really believe he needed to express a little bit more had to do with housing. As you know, he's been the governor for the last four years, shortly coming in after Hurricane Irma and Maria. And unfortunately, the people of this territory, several of them are still dealing with this housing issue. I mean, we still have blue tarps. I personally felt that we could have been further along or should have been further along. But I really wish that he could have given a little bit more detail in regards to that because you have people still living with friends and family. They're considered homeless. And for the 2,000 plus properties and 3,000 plus housing properties that they're supposed to be developing, I really wanted to hear a lot more about details as to how you're going to get these things executed because nobody wants to feel like they're still in a situation like this heading into year five and you you've already touched on it speak about what you

2:27:19 feel properly well i i i was a little bit there was a little bit of lax when it came to crime You know, I think he skirted over it a little bit, but when someone is in their home, especially, let's say this past holiday, and the amount of guns that we heard shoot off in this territory, you know, I was looking forward. What did the police department do? What was happening with all of these spot shooters that they invested all this money in? Can you give us reports on the amount of arrests? Because people need to feel safe in their own community. and I really really was looking forward to hearing a little bit more detail about that but you know it was a overall skirting of quite a bit of areas across the board he also touched on something that immediately I was a little bit alarmed about he spoke about a pieces of legislation he intends to send down to the legislature in regards to the transferring of people's abandoned properties to conservative ships and nonprofit organizations. Now, I don't have a problem with this government wanting to step in and assist with abandoning properties. I just would like to see what this legislation speaks to, because anything, and I'm going to say this, anything that is going to attempt to take the properties from the people from anyone in this territory, you're going to have contend with me so that's just my thought so i will be fair and i'll wait for the legislation to come down all right thank you senator for your time africa back to you thank you thank you jamal joining me is senator javon james how are you i'm fine and greetings to the people of the u.s

2:29:05 virginalance wonderful and what did you think about the governor's speech i saw where he tried to touch on as many areas as he can but unfortunately of course there would always be one or two or three things that we will feel that he did not touch on but overall I would give him a minus a minus because we know the situation with WAPA and I know he did mention WAPA and the hard work that is happening there with WAPA but we all know that we're subsidizing WAPA right now and we all want to know okay when will be that cutoff point and when we do cut off what will we supplement that with you know so there must be some continuity but overall a minus okay an a minus it is in terms of tourism he talked about how tourism is transforming and he mentioned how frederickstead and sabay's and crown bay is currently being developed and we're going to have more restaurants and shops for the tourists do you think that will make the virgin islands the number one premier destination is that enough uh for now yes because certain things take time you know we can't watch other islands or other places in the world and compare ourselves to them because everything requires funding and uh succession planning so long story short as the chair of the committee on economic development and agriculture i plan to bring in the respective entities and agencies as far as port authority um we call it department of tourism and all those other stakeholders meet with the chambers of commerce to make sure that the economy is

sustainable and whatever areas you can improve on as far as tweaking the legislation that not just me but my colleagues and i can make it happen but overall i i feel that while we speak about tourism we have to diversify it and in terms of the economy he talked about the revenues increase highlights like the general fund increase in the corporate income taxes fund as well as the real property taxes but is there another area that he missed in terms of boosting

2:31:17 our economy no i think they're doing a great job as far as a collection with the lieutenant governor's office for the property taxes we saw where we were able to pay a lot of our debt that we had for many years so all of that contributed to yes us collecting fees and to the the hurricanes irma maria funds and also the arpa funds so as far as economic development we know that the cannabis industry is going to bring in some some fees as well and some revenue so i look forward to that coming into fruition you know so also for your last question what do you think was there anything in his speech that you think he should have mentioned tonight yeah he should have mentioned that I championed the cricket field that was me for the island of St. Croix I also championed the drag racing on St. Croix that was me as well and I took a hard blow for supporting the Southland deal I was the lone St. Croix vote but I did that and I also brought the legislation for the five million dollars for the Randall Doctrine's race track on the LLC inquiry so yeah. Thank you Senator. Back to you Jamal. Thank you. We are here with Senator James. How are you tonight Senator? Good night. I'm well.

2:32:31 Thank you. How are you? I'm good. Okay. How did you feel tonight about the governor's speech? Well my first reaction to it really is that it was optimistic. That's the word that I felt described his attitude his feelings about where the VI is right now so and he seemed to be very optimistic even though at the end of his speech he talked a little bit about the doom and gloom regarding you know the recession and inflation and those things but overall he seemed to be very upbeat about the fact that we have all these monies, the ARPA funds, you know, the money that we got from Irma Maria, the recovery funds, and at the same time, you know, he in a way seemed to also temper it with statements like the fact that we don't have enough workers, 5,000 workers we need in order to do all those construction projects that he talked would be bringing in all that money. He also talked a little bit about education and and you know I'm the chair of the Education Development Committee. He did not go into a little more, I guess I wanted a little more because I'm the chair of that committee clearly but I felt that he touched on it but didn't give me personally enough at the same time I intend to meet with the Commission of Education and see what her plans are and what the plans from with the different principles are I was invited

2:34:25 by them this week to some presentation so I'm looking forward to that but I was hoping that the governor would say something like in the next before I leave as governor the reading scores of our children will be above average that's that's possible that's doable and I was hoping for a statement like that he he made the statement I think at the very end that we need to our community needs start seeing the value in education there was a statement something like that that so clearly he doesn't think that that our community sees the value in education and so we need to do something about that somehow we as elected officials need to make sure that we get our community to understand how valuable education is he also when it comes to workforce development he underscored that every qualified virgin islander who wants a job can get a job so how do we get them to be qualified right we may have all these opportunities but you know based on what the governor was saying it seems as if here the people are swimming in the sea of opportunities but they they're drawn in at the same time you know you know what i'm saying yeah there's a lot but then for some reason our people aren't taking advantage that's what i got from him also so he seemed to be reaching out to people asking them um i was a little not a little i was disappointed that he didn't touch on agriculture because um that also is one way that we need to grow our economy and sustain ourselves he didn't he didn't talk about i don't remember him talking about agriculture

2:36:19 at all so i was hoping that he would do that especially since today we at in the senate we passed the the you know the monies for the different um mandates in the agriculture the territorial agriculture plan um but overall i think that what i liked was the fact that he talked about wanting a unified approach and i like when you know people are very open and very willing to be collaborative and um you know work with others and he seemed to be that way so you know i worked with him for a year um when he first got in his first year and so i know him and i and i and i believe that um i will have a good working relationship with with the governor because I intend to share my recommendations and my suggestions and my ideas with him.

2:37:13 And I think that he will be receptive, I think, not only to me, but hopefully to others. Another area that I was a little concerned about was the abandoned buildings that he talked about because the government of the VA first has to take care of its abandoned buildings. There are a lot of derelict buildings that the VA government owns. And so before we go to the private land owners or we, you know, homeowners, we need to make sure that we, as the Virgin Islands government, will identify all those buildings that we own and get them those repaired, renovated, and offer them to the nonprofit entities that he mentioned. I believe he mentioned in his speech, in his address. I'm very hopeful that Arthur Richards will, in fact, have the groundbreaking in February because he mentioned it in his last speech last year. I'm

hoping that happens. I'm also hoping that Melvin H. Evans Highway will get lit like the airport runway that he promised us before.

2 : 38 : 21 So there were some things, you know, that clearly didn't happen, but I'm hoping that now they will happen because as a governor who is not up for re-election, this is his opportunity to do all he can to leave a legacy of excellence and I think he can with the support of the legislature and the people. If he is and we are willing to work hard, i believe the possibilities are endless for us to really have that era of prosperity not only for some but for all of us so i'm hoping that happens all right senator thank you very much for your time thank you thank you back to you africa well jamal we have definitely did it again I think that the governor's speech it was really interesting he spoke a lot on the economic boost and the tourism and the different entities and economies but you know we have really boosted this year in terms of tourism the health and hospitals what were your thoughts on his speech it's upbeat it's hey everything is starting to get better i think this would be i think if you were to compare last year and this year it would be it's a market difference from last year and i absolutely agree i mean he spoke a lot about how the economy has improved we have a

2 : 40 : 07 lot of money for housing for to improve our education system and that's great i mean it's about time that the virgin islands is in the up and up especially post pandemic yes um the pandemic did wreak a very ugly head on us and i think it's i think it's starting to turn around it's starting to look like a bright day anyway thank you so much for tuning in to legit tv i'm africa Harrigan I'm Jamal Potter and thank you for watching

People named in this transcript

SUSPECTED, and a finding aid only. Names were matched by machine against the spellings used across all 426 of our transcripts, and the title is the one used in the room. Being named here is NOT evidence that a person attended or spoke · only that the name was said. Speech recognition mishears names, so a spelling may be wrong even where no alternative is offered.

3x	Senator Ray Fonseca heard in this transcript as: Fonseca
2x	Senator Alma Francis-Heyliger heard in this transcript as: Alma Francis Heiliger
2x	Senator Carla Joseph
2x	Senator Franklin D. Johnson heard in this transcript as: Franklin Johnson
2x	Senator Marise C. James the surname alone also matches: Javan James; Giovanni James Sr heard in this transcript as: James
2x	Senator Milton E. Potter
2x	Senator Samuel Carrion heard in this transcript as: Samuel Samy Carrion