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0:00:00 Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back.

0:02:00 Let's go. Let's go. Let's get started. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Let's get started. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. I love you Thank you. Let's go. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. Let's go. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Let's go. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back.

0:22:00 Let's go. Let's go. Thank you.

0:23:30 Pleasant good evening to everyone. We're out of recess and this session is hereby called to order. At this time, we'll ask our pastor, Reginald Perry of Victorious Believers Ministry to do the invocation and that will be followed by the national anthem and the Virgin Islands March. Please rise. Let us bow our head. God, we thank you for another day.

0:24:08 Morning by morning and day by day, new mercies we see. All that we need, your hand has provided. Great is your mercy towards us. God, as we gather today, we pause to ask your presence over this day and over each of us. over all our leaders and officials of this great territory of ours. The beauty of it is, with all of its challenges, it's ours by stewardship and not by ownership. Give our leaders wisdom, guidance, and direction that our territory will be better for all and not just some. Give them the strategies they may all experience this beauty of this place, this territory in ways unimaginable. Guide them and direct them by your hand that we, your people, will divinely benefit this day and in the days to come. Thank you, God, for loaning us this time.

0:24:58 Time doesn't belong to us, but to you. Give to us the time wisely and leave our marks on the tree of time in great and grand ways. Thank you for the success of this day. In your name we pray, amen. Thank you. Anytime while the choir is

making their way in, please, any cell phones, please put them on mute or turn them off as to not interrupt tonight's proceedings. This is a good time. Check your phones and make sure they're on mute or turned off. We have the Charlotte Amali High School Concert Choir that's making their way in for our of National Anthem and Diversion House March this evening.

0:26:48 Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, please be seated. We'll await the Charlotte Amali High School Concert Choir.

0:27:48 Welcome, please rise. We'll be right back. And the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air, Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there, O say does that star-spangled banner yet wave O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?

0:29:40 All hail the Virgin Islands, emeralds of the sea, where beaches bright with coral sands, And trade winds bless our native lands All hail the Virgin Islands The hills and waters blue We give our loyalty Fall to thee and pledge allegiance forever true God bless the Virgin Islands Come with us, we pray, where all mankind can join today in friendly warmth of work and play.

0:30:42 God bless the Virgin Islands Beautiful and tall Beneath the sunny skies Hail tops I hold on a welcome For one and all Thank you very much. Please be seated. Thank you very much for that wonderful National Anthem and the Verdans March by the Charlotte Amali High School Concert Choir, as well as our invocation this evening by Pastor Reginald Perry. At this time, Madam Secretary, can I have a roll call?

0:31:33 Good evening. Senator Marvin A. Blyden? Present. Senator Blyden? Present. Senator Angel L. Bolquez, Jr. Present. Senator Bolquez, present. Senator Diane T. Capehart. Present. Senator Capehart, present. Senator Samuel Carrion. Senator Carrion, absent. Senator Duane M. DeGraff. Senator Dwayne M. DeGraff, absent. Senator Ray Fonseca.

0:32:16 I'm here. Senator Fonseca, present. Senator Novel E. Francis Jr. I'm here. Senator Francis, present. Senator Alma Francis Heiliger. Present. Senator Francis Heiliger, present. Senator Donna Fred Gregory. Here. Senator Fred Gregory, present. Senator Kenneth L. Gittins. Here. Senator Gittins, present. Senator Maurice C. James. Here. Senator James, present.

0:32:56 Senator Javon E. James, senior. Present. Senator James, senior, present. Senator Franklin D. Johnson. here senator johnson present senator carla j joseph senator joseph present senator milton e potter senator potter present mr president we have 13 members present and two members absent thank you very much madam secretary at this time we do have a quorum and prepare to proceed madam clerk any correspondence to be read into the record at this time yes mr president you may proceed with reading of those correspondence letter dated january 22nd 2024 honorable novelle e francis jr senate president dear senate president francis please accept my apologies for my tardiness to this evening's Monday, January 22, 2024 session meeting scheduled to begin at 6 p.m. due to unexpected travel delay.

0:34:07 I kindly ask for your patience and understanding until I can join the meeting. I am looking forward to participating fully as soon as I arrive. Thank you in advance for your kind consideration and understanding. Sincerely, Samuel Carrion, Senator, 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands. This concludes the reading of the correspondence Thank you very much, Mr. President. Thank you very much, Madam Clerk, at this time. Madam Secretary, please mark, as well as Madam Clerk, please mark Senator Samuel Carrion as excused, and we'll certainly record his presence once he get here.

0:34:43 And give me a tally, please. Mr. President, we have 13 members present, one member absent, and one member excused. Thank you very much. At this time, Madam Clerk, please read today's agenda into the record. Consideration of floor agenda. The 35th legislature of the Virgin Islands will convene to receive the State of the Territory Address from the Honorable Albert Bryan Jr., Governor of the Virgin Islands. This concludes the reading of the agenda, Mr. President.

0:35:20 Thank you very much. Let me say a pleasant good evening once again On the behalf of the members of the 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, I'm honored to welcome Governor Albert Brand Jr. to present the State of the Territory Address pursuant to the Revised Organic Act of 1954, U.S. Code, Title 48, Chapter 12, Section 1575, Subchapter 3, which provides that the Governor shall come before this body in session to submit a message on the State of the Territory, We are also honored to welcome members of the judiciary, as well as the governor's cabinet. So they'll be joining us momentarily.

0:35:59 At this time, we'll stand in recess while we begin to receive those individuals in the chambers. We'll stand in recess for 10 minutes. Thank you. Let's go. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I love you Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Let me live in the heaven, and I talk to myself in the heaven, talk to myself in the

0:48:19 Tom's up if you go him. Hey, and when CV got talking, the wire for the head, the head is a little bit.

- 0:49:16 I'll see you next time. Thank you. Thank you. All right guys, give me the audio check.
- 0:51:09 Go ahead. Okay. No, no, no, no, I'm solo for now. I'm putting it up like this, without checking it on the inside. Yeah, I get it, I get it level 3. We're going to go live with Ayo, okay? You hear it in the headset, you got to turn it on. Thank you. I love you Thank you. We'll be right back.
- 0:53:44 How are you doing, Jamal? How are you doing? Good, how are you? Good, all as well. We are here at the Governor's State Auditory Address 2024. Are you excited? How are you feeling? I'm feeling excited. I'm excited to hear what the Governor has to say about, you know, how everything is going. good. We were just looking outside. It was a beautiful shot. We do see that we have some protesters already. So a lot of conversations to be had tonight, a lot of anticipation to what the governor's trying to talk about and what's next. So we're in for a little while. So what are your thoughts so far as you see it? So far, so far. Once again, I am excited to hear what the governor has to say about how things are going i think we've had a we've i guess we had a lot of interest and a lot of thoughts about what's been happening recently i know we've had some conversation about how you know finances are going you know particularly education we know that's been a big topic recently particularly as it's going with you know states of state of the schools state of the quality of education so i think that's probably one thing that i'm really excited to hear about i'm actually the son of us of a teacher so i'm very i'm very particularly excited to see what we always we always talk about education that's one of the forefronts of what it is um we always think about it the children and whatnot so that definitely has to be on top another one is will definitely be healthcare you know how where are we doing for for our elders and stuff like that um wapa um i mean we have a lot of things that i'm sure the governor is going to touch on um but like i said we're optimistic like we always are this is
- 0:55:37 actually his sixth senator yeah this is the sixth so now he should be a real pro at it right now right i think at this time this should probably just come off the factory yes right agreed agreed agreed agreed so right now we are we're waiting the governor um and his team um we saw some of these have his cabinets are they're making their way in um the 35th legislation convening as well um we had some um some beautiful ladies singing the national anthems i think they're a part of the high school yeah i think that's from charlotte molly high school someone correct me if i'm wrong great job great job wonderful job and then we had our pastor from from the big island of St. Croix. So we're off to a good start and as I said, we're looking forward to there's another shot of outside looking real beautiful. We could see some of the protesters as well and the red carpet and looking nice, looking nice, nice and clean.
- 0:56:31 Nice and clean. Okay. So I haven't seen the carpet right now. We haven't seen much people there right now. So we're waiting for, like I said, waiting for the governor's appearance and his entourage. And you know, that's a big thing, the prompt and circumstances that we look forward to. well like i said the state of the territory we um i look forward for it um this is about i've been with the legislation now for 10 years so i got accustomed to to listen to it and listening to to different governors our point of view and and and how they see most of the time is mostly about what it is they have done in the year or years that's past and what it is they plan to do in in the future um these are it is an election year for the senate with the case to be so a lot more responsibility on them to make sure that you know we have the things running in a perfect way what are you what are your thoughts on that um well this is this is only this is approaching my second year working for the legislature so a lot of this process is still particularly new to me and what i've always said is that i would like to see a lot more things with education you know i think the average person is not really aware of basically how the government works you know this is something that you know this happens every year and a lot of people probably are completely they're oblivious to it so i would like people to tune in to see hey this is how this is working this is how you know this is how these things happen and you know we we're seeing protests um protests this is a part of democracy we have everyone has the the opportunity to protest their government so i love to see protests i love to see people you know protesting they're they're they are protesting for what they want i used to be the best thing yeah this is this is the
- 0:58:34 perfect time to all the senators perfect time for you to to protest and say hey we we want you to do this we demand this this is this is how this is how this process works i agree definitely i agreed agreed agreed you see they have some signs and they look energetic they're waving the signs and if we're not that's that is that is kind of cool that's what we that's what we're here for yeah um we have to come together as a community as well yeah the senator and the governor they have a job to do but we still have a responsibility for both for ourselves and to ask a question and to get things going in the best possible way that that suits all virgin islanders you know so good things good things good things good things good things we just came off of St. Croix festival as well and we didn't have a bad time actually um no heap of dramas no and and and i and i love that i think i'm i think at this point everybody knows i'm a huge fan of carnival and festival so i i enjoy going to St. Croix i enjoy you know embracing myself in that crucial culture and you know just being a part of that because i think it's a wonderful thing that you can you embrace yourself in your culture you can celebrate this as often as you can right right right and then we have we just had a a meeting the other day on finance so right now we kind of

sketchy with the finances coming up with the case we also have symptoms kind of all coming up right along the corner as well so it's just to see if that is mentioned as well can we know as far as the the carnival is concerned it's big for tourism and other people come in more flights come in we have we have heard that you know tourism is booming right now but i would like to see what's the plan with tourism you know how are we going to how are we going to stay that into

1:00:23 you know a future because i think some people are a bit you know yes tourism is booming now but what are our plans with that what are we going to use that how are we going to use that to to better this territory what's what's our plans with that right right right so there's a lot of a lot of anticipation for what the governor is going to speech is going to be for this year um looking forward to it looking forward to it um like i said there's so much things that that we that we went through in the last especially the last two years we're still coming out of covid um we still have the hurricanes and our watch we still have all these millions of dollars to take care of infrastructure um new schools so there's a lot of tough weeks for us to really for him to talk about um most like i said usually he puts in front what he has done in the last year and and what's what he's planning to do um so like i said i'm looking forward to the plans the future plans that's how we're going um address some of these situations um some are are immediate and some are long term and we see some cars coming as the as the governor writing now okay so we're going to turn you back inside this oh all the cars are rolling in all the calls are rolling in and we're out of recess at this time um we're also honored to welcome members of the judiciary to include our chief justice the honorable reese hodge um as well as the uh honorable deborah watlington presiding judge of the territorial court and of course the honorable robert molloy chief justice chief judge of the district court of the versions uh we also have members of the semi-autonomous as well as the autonomous

1:02:20 agencies and we welcome the governor's cabinet as well and they've been led by chief of staff carl knight as well as other members of the judiciary that's present here today Madam Clerk, while we receive the Governor's Cabinet, please also record Senator Samuel Carillon as well as Senate Minority Leader, Senator Duane DeGraff.

1:03:25 I'm Senators, and good evening. Madam Secretary, can we have a quorum call?

1:04:05 Certainly Mr. President, Senator Marvin A. Blyden, Senator Blyden present, Senator Angel Boquez Jr., Senator Boquez present, Senator Diane T. Capehart, Senator Capehart Present. Senator Samuel Carrion. Present. Senator Carrion, present. Senator Dwayne M. DeGraff. I'm here. Senator DeGraff, present. Senator Ray Fonseca. I'm here. Senator Fonseca, present. Senator Novel E. Francis Jr. Senator Francis, present. Senator Alma Francis Heiliger. Present. Senator Francis Heiliger, present. Senator Donna Fred Gregory, here. Senator Fred Gregory, present. Senator Kenneth L. Gittins, here. Senator Gittins, present. Senator Maurice C. James, here. Senator James, present. Senator Javon E. James, senior. Senator James, senior, present. senator franklin d johnson senator johnson present senator carla j joseph present senator joseph present senator milton e potter senator potter present mr president we have 15 members present uh thank you very much madam secretary and we do have all 15 members present uh this evening for the state of the territory address at this time we'd like to

1:05:57 welcome the mother of the lieutenant governor miss my Iona Roach Or maybe not. Welcome, Mrs. Roach.

1:07:07 Thank you. And she'll be presented with a bouquet of roses by Ms. Sherry Carty.

1:07:58 Next, we'll introduce the Congresswoman, Stacey Plaskett, and she'll be escorted by Senate Majority Leader, Senator Kenneth L. Gittins. Welcome. Thank you.

1:09:07 At this time, we'll welcome the Lieutenant Governor of the Virgin Islands, the Honorable Tregenza Roach, and he'll be escorted by Senator Carla Joseph, Madam Secretary. Please rise. Thank you.

1:10:02 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Mr. President, the Governor of the United States, the Honorable Albert Bryan Jr.

1:12:02 Thank you. Thank you.

1:13:02 Please remain standing as we have a presentation by the Honourable Reverend Father Anthony abraham of our lady of mount carmel church our scripture reading is taken from isaiah 41 verses 10 and following so do not fear for i am with you and do not be dismayed for i am your god i will strengthen you and help you i will uphold you with my righteous right hand let us pray lord we thank you for this day we thank you for the many blessings you have bestowed upon us we pray oh god this evening you will be with us through the power of your spirit we pray that That your blessing will be upon our governor, our lieutenant governor, and all members of the legislature. We pray, O God, that this evening you will uncover your face to us. That you will be gracious to us as we reflect on the many blessings you have bestowed upon us and upon this territory. Lord, today, may you uncover your face to us and be gracious to us and give us peace.

1:14:44 In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Good evening. Please be seated. Reverend Father Anthony Abraham, Lieutenant Governor Tregenza A. Roach Esquire, Senate President Novell Francis Jr. and members of the 35th Legislature, Chief Justice Reese Hodge and justices of the Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands,

presiding Judge Deborah Watlington and the judges of the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands, Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett, Chief Judge Robert Molloy, and judges of the District Court of the Virgin Islands, members of my cabinet and other agency heads, members of my staff, state chair of the Democratic Party, Stedman Hodge, other invited guests, and my fellow Virgin Islanders. Good evening. This evening, I'm grateful for the privilege of appearing before you again as Governor of the Virgin Islands of the United States to report on the state of the territory as mandated in the revised Organic Act of 1954.

1:16:10 This is my sixth such address to the Senate, and I always look forward excitedly for the opportunity. However, as I look out at the audience, I'm reminded that we have lost some pillars of our community since I last addressed you. Even with my very own cabinet, I am missing the face of Darryl Mousy George, who stood unwaveringly with me and our administration throughout this journey. His absence here tonight is surely felt, as is the absence of the Honorable Alicia Chucky Hansen. She provided invaluable wisdom and experience as my political advisor and served this community with passion and love. Please join me in a moment of silent reflection for all those who we lost in 2023, but who have forever left their mark on us and these islands.

1:17:05 Thank you. Please join me in honoring the service of the brave men and women of the Virgin Islands Army and Air National Guards. Last year marked the 50th year of federal recognition of the Army and National Guard. 50 years of excellence. I'm immensely proud of our soldiers and grateful for the redeployment of the Army Guard's 114th aviation detachment from the southern border of the United States, where they supported the Department of Homeland Security. We are also happy to have our Air Guard men and women home from the deployments in Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, United Arab Emirates, and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Our airmen and soldiers continue to demonstrate their competence and readiness, whether deployed within the Caribbean, activated during our local state of emergencies, or protecting the President of the United States. The contributions of our National Guard demonstrate to the rest of the nation and the world the high caliber of professionals that call the Virgin Islands home.

1:18:18 As we embark on this blessed new year, the state of our territory is resolute. We are purposeful, determined, and steadfast. The social and economic impacts of COVID-19 pandemic are increasingly further in the rear view mirror, and we remain firmly focused on the opportunity to permanently transform the Virgin Islands into a home that provides us all the standard of living and the quality of life we deserve. Hand in hand with you, we withstood the challenges and uncertainties of that time, but we have not been deterred from continuing to deliver on our promise of progress for the people of the Virgin Islands.

1:19:04 that progress that progress is most evident in the strength of our economy despite facing inflation rising interest rates and volatile global conditions our economy continues to demonstrate resilience through sustained economic and job growth while the growth of the last two years has been more modest than the years prior the rebound from the covid 19 pandemic has been remarkable. Consumer spending, tourism, and significant investments from businesses and the public sector have driven this incredible growth. GDP. According to the United States Bureau of Economic Analysis, the territory's gross domestic product, or GDP, in 2021 was valued at \$4 billion, 2.8% higher in 21 than 20. This marked the strongest recovery and the fastest growth of all territories. While the final reports are not yet available, public sector, business investment, and the ongoing recovery in the tourism sector are projected to have generated more than 2% growth in the 2022 and 2023 years. Our employment numbers have improved. We have created 1,000 new jobs in 2023 alone. This 2.8% growth was mainly in the private sector, specifically in the hospitality industry, as that industry recovered from the pandemic and the 2017 storms. Other sectors in the economy remain relatively unchanged, demonstrating our consistent economic performance. Unemployment rates also remain low during this period. Last year, we realized a record low unemployment rate in the history of the U.S. Virgin Islands at 3.2% in the month of November, and averaged 3.5% throughout the year. This was lower than the national average of 3.64%. There is even more potential job growth if they restarted the refinery and other hospitality projects come online. So while recent indicators suggest some normalization is underway, the labour market is forecast to perform well, even as a post-COVID momentum eases. In fiscal year 2023, the value of building permits issued was \$305 million, which indicates a 5% increase compared to \$290 million in 2022 for the same period. During 2023, the private residential construction permits were worth \$166 million, which is only slightly higher than the \$165 million worth of permits issued in 2022.

1:21:45 However, the non-residential construction permit showed significant growth, 200%, increasing from \$27.7 million in 2022 to \$83.5 million in 2023. However, if it feels like the economy has not been as prosperous as the economic indicators suggest, it is not your imagination. We have been battling the headwinds of inflation for at least the last three years. The positive impact of our economic growth has been significantly tempered by high inflation, with steep increases in food, housing, and construction costs being the most significant concern. Now, I frequently go to the grocery stores in both districts and have witnessed a sticker shock on certain food items.

- 1:22:43 Our local consumer price index increased 8.6% in 2021 and again by 9.8% for the 12 months ending December 2022. That means between January 2021 and December 2022, inflation in the Virgin Islands increased by a whopping 20%. This translates to Ms. Mary's shopping cart, which cost her \$100 in January 2022, increasing to one hundred and twenty dollars by the end of last year now while we got some release from a decline in gasoline prices in the second half of 22 food and housing costs remain high putting an incredible strain on our households the good news is that the national inflation rate appears to be slowing down as the federal government policies start to take effect however the trade-off is that these policies have resulted in rising interest rates which have been which have made credit and access to capital all more expensive for all americans including virgin islanders but thankfully the recession that was predicted in by economists in 2023 never happened and the national economy has remained steady in fact the stock markets finished this year at or near an all-time high. While higher interest rates and elevated inflation can be expected to weigh on economic activity in the near term, these factors have not altered the longer-term outlook for our economy. The Virgin Islands remains well positioned to navigate these challenges and is expected to experience continued economic growth in the coming years. Our economy now is indeed stronger than it was before the pandemic. That is undeniable economic progress. Now tourism continues to thrive with our cruise ship business standing out as the strongest in the eastern caribbean. In fiscal year 23 cruise passenger arrivals soared by an impressive 87%, reaching almost 1.6 million compared to 851,000 in fiscal year 22, surpassing pre-pandemic levels. The territory also saw a 36.5 increase in cruise ship visits, totaling 516 calls made in fiscal year 23. Notably, St. Croix experienced a remarkable 100% increase in cruise ship arrivals over
- 1:25:22 the past year. In fiscal year 23, air arrivals experienced a 4.5% decrease to 756,000 from 792,000. Can't win them all. In the previous, and although this is following a record high in surge in air arrivals, although Although the current figure is lower than the record set in 2021, it still represents an improvement from pre-pandemic levels. This decline is attributed to the challenge of the airline industry and what has faced really for the last two years in building capacity to meet growing travel demand. We all know the cost of the fares to come home has increased dramatically. We are in demand.
- 1:26:17 We did, however, witness an increase in regional transportation options last year. Sky High Aviation started two weekly flights between St. Thomas and the Dominican Republic and once a week between the Dominican Republic and St. Croix. Cape Air began offering eight flights a week between St. Thomas and Nevis. Silver Airways resumed airlift connecting St. Croix and St. Thomas and continued flights between the Virgin Islands and San Juan. Fly the Whale, finally, provides daily flights between St. Croix and St. Thomas, a most welcome development after the challenges we face post-COVID. I particularly want to thank Omar Ursula, the president of Fly the Whale, for working with us to provide affordable and comfortable inter-island travel for all of us.
- 1:27:10 We expect much more announcements of continued progress in this regard soon, right, Joe? Hotel occupancy rates in the territory remain stable at 58% in 2023, a slight decrease from the 63% in fiscal year 2022. This decline is attributed to the popularity of Airbnb accommodations due to the limited availability of traditional hotels, not a decrease in the number of overnight stays. Despite the shortage of hotel rooms, the number of visitors from the U.S. mainland that stayed for an average of three and a half nights significantly increased. In fiscal year 23, there were over 452,000 overnight visitors, an 85% increase when compared to fiscal year 22. Excitingly, the newly opened Western Beach Resort and spot, Frenchman's Reefs, has significantly expanded our hotel inventory, contributing to the positive momentum in the tourism sector. The 392-room hotel plays a critical role for the entire territory by restoring our appeal as a convention destination. Right next door, the 92-room Morningstar Bowie House Beach Resort, part of the Marriott Autograph Collection brand, opened its doors in May. Together, both hotels represent \$425 million worth of redevelopment of Frenchman's Reef in St. Thomas. Made possible by the incentives of the Hotel Development Act, I want to give thanks to Fortress Investment Group, the Economic Development Authority, the Public Finance Authority, and this body for making this a reality.
- 1:28:58 On the western end of St. Thomas, the owners of By the Sea Resort at Botany Bay have made significant strides in developing that hotel, with construction of the first group of guest units well on the way. I was totally blown away to see the level of work and detail that the Ferreres have invested in this beautiful property. The Hampton in Haven's site mall has also broken ground. The project is a five-story, 126-room hotel for business and leisure travelers. This property is expected to come online next year. It was a development that has come to fruition at a record pace, thanks to the GRS team and Sean Miller, who has made considerable investments in our territory's success. On St. Croix, the Carambola Beach Resort is gradually reclaiming its former prominence as a luxurious beachfront destination under new ownership. Carambola never really closed its doors despite sustaining major damage during the hurricane. Since then the property has proudly presented itself with 150 renovated and upgraded rooms under the Marriott brand. Finally, the Hibiscus Hotel on the north shore of St. Croix has entered the first phase of its redevelopment. I commend the Hamed family for making the investment to restore this property to its prior beauty. After 40 years, 40 years of being unable to build a new hotel in this territory, construction and developments are underway.

- 1:30:37 To keep these properties filled and the hoteliers happy, we must consistently market these islands to our potential guests. In this regard, the Department of Tourism continues to win industry accolades for its naturally-in-rhythm marketing campaign. The U.S. Virgin Islands was recognized in 2023 as a top travel destination, again, by prestigious publications like Condé Nast Travel, Travel and Leisure, Travel Magazine, and Frommer's. Tourism remains the cornerstone of our economy, and we excel in managing it.
- 1:31:14 Fiscal year 2023 saw our streak of four consecutive years of general fund revenue growth come to an end. Gross revenue collections total a little over \$942 million in fiscal year 2023, compared to a record peak of almost \$1.1 billion in fiscal year 2022. That's right, ladies and gentlemen.
- 1:31:44 collected 1.1 billion dollars in fiscal year 22 in revenue. It remains the high watermark for revenue collection by the government of the Virgin Islands ever. It was a banner year. However, our collections were in line with our revenue projections for fiscal year 2023 revenues. Our office of management budget gross revenue was projected to approximately 934 million for fiscal year 23, and collections were off by less than 1%. But this downturn in revenues is mostly attributed to the end of COVID-related fiscal stimulus relief. This direct infusion of cash to the population included the impact stimulus payment, the increased child tax credits, the pandemic EBT transferred, all those nice food stamps, premium pay, everybody's knocking on my door for those water and power authority credits stipend for social recipients rental assistance mortgage assistance and subsidies to taxi drivers just to name some of the larger programs these programs had greater than anticipated impact on the economic activity in the territory and helped generate substantial tax revenues for the government those stimuli have worked their way through the local economy and now revenue collections are normalizing Now, although the streak is broken, the revenues collected by this government remain far above where they were in the years before the pandemic.
- 1:33:22 While the naysayers continue to predict fiscal calamity, our government's finances remain strong and steady. The numbers simply don't lie. The fact is, revenues for the first quarter of the fiscal year 2024 are already above revenues for the same period in fiscal year 23. However, there is some cause for concern. The last six months have seen our expenditures outpace revenue collections. This has depleted our available cash on hand and caused significant delays in making vendor payments. We could have predicted this. The government, just like everybody else, has been subject to the rising cost of goods and services resulting from the same inflation. This includes well-deserved salary increases that have been awarded to our public sector workers. We're not behind on any of those. Our available cash on hand has also been strained by aggressive efforts to stay on track with our commitments to pay income tax refunds and retroactive wages simply put we paint debts that are 40 years old with today's operating revenues all while continuing to build up cash reserves in our rainy day fund yes ladies and gentlemen we have a rainy day fund with 20 million in it it. We anticipate that this is a temporary cash crunch, and we remain on track to meet our projections for the collections of revenues in the current years. I want to assure our vendors this evening that we are working hard to catch up on outstanding payments, and we will. That is currently the administration's highest priority. But in the interim, we have begun exploring options for establishing a line of credit for working capital. We look forward to further discussions with this body regarding the authorization to establish
- 1:35:24 such a credit vehicle. The government depends on two big paydays each year. One in April when we get the taxes and one in October when the late taxes come in. But all the expenses are incurred and paid constantly throughout the year. Now, while the present situation could benefit from the additional liquidity offered by a line of credit, having a general fund budget that is approaching \$1 billion, I didn't say total, no, just a general fund, there's another \$400 million in federal funds. Now, having a general fund approaching \$1 billion, it means that we have to develop a more permanent cash management strategy.
- 1:36:07 To effectively manage government operation, it's time to join the modern financial world and establish a permanent revolving line of credit to bridge the gaps in revenue collections. Just like all of you in here and outside there, you have a credit card to get you from one payday to the next every two weeks. You need to buy something now. You expect the money to come in. My money don't come until April. Give me a little credit. We are ready to have those conversations with this body.
- 1:36:40 Perhaps the primary driver of our progress as a territory has been the unprecedented level of public infrastructure projects currently underway. The ongoing rehabilitation of Melvin Evans Highway has brought critical improvements to the entire corridor. This includes reconstruction of the stormwater drainage system, traffic and safety enhancements such as street lights, guard rails, dedicated turning lanes, and roadway widening and repaving. Additionally, we have constructed an entire new Clifton Hill Connector Road and will be improving the adjacent Container Port Road intersection to include dedicated turning lane. This entire project is a significant improvement for the safety of our motorists, and you can already see the progress. No more blind hills and hazardous conditions for our pedestrians. I am fully aware of the

inadequate lighting situation on Melvin-Evans Highway and the great safety concern it presents, but over the last decade, the lighting has deteriorated due to the theft of copper wires, hurricane damage, blown bulbs. Frankly, I can't remember the last time I saw that highway fully lit. However, under this administration, I am pleased to announce that at least 45% of the street light on the highway have already been restored or replaced, with the remainder expected to be completed this summer I know you all think I travel different roads but just like you I frequently travel the same roads in the territory I also hear constantly from other residents including my own child in my house who are affected by potholes and poor road conditions early upon become government becoming governor I recognize that the federal highway funds allotted to the the territory were totally inadequate to address all our needs. That is why we have been dedicating increasing amounts of local funds to supplement these federal dollars. These last four years have seen millions upon millions of dollars invested in the territory's roadways. Even though last year's local funds for road work were not as substantial as previous years, we were still able to begin work on roads in Estate Wim and Mount Pleasant on St. Croix in Este Bolongo and Bovoni and St. Thomas. We have earmarked another \$5 million this fiscal year for the Transportation Trust Fund, and we will use those funds to get back on track. Additionally, I am extremely pleased to announce tonight that the long-awaited road rehabilitation project to the Ethel McIntosh Memorial Drive, also known as Mahogany Road, is now in the procurement stage with an award announcement expected in the next few weeks after almost 20 years we're going to get this road paved and we are all

1:39:28 ecstatic to see this project finally happening happening similarly similarly the long-awaited FEMA funded projects for roads have also continued residents can expect to see significant improvements in many areas across all four islands with an emphasis on resilient and hardened infrastructure. On Wardle Island alone, over 60% of the roadways have been improved and rehabilitated. Roads in Francis Bay, Cruise Bay, Susannaberg and Pastorey have already been addressed on St. John, on St. Thomas. Work has started at Cabrera Point and Botany Bay. Now the FEMA process has been slow and painstaking, but it's paying dividends. Like elsewhere in the country, the The historic bridges on St. Croix are starting to show their age and are in need of repair. Contracts have been awarded to the repair of five of those bridges. The temporary Altona Bridge was completed in the summer 2023 and is currently in use. The Altona Lagoon, Queen Mary Highway, East Airport Ridge projects are all in progress and is scheduled to be completed in the next few months. To maintain traffic flow, the Agriculture Road Bridge and the Midland Road Bridge will commence once the other projects are completed. Now our ports, just like our road infrastructure, are undergoing modernization and improvement.

1:40:56 The Virgin Islands Port Authority is in the process of selecting a development partner to modernize and upgrade the Henry E. Rosen Airport on St. Croix and the Cyrillic King Airport on St. Thomas. In this latest endeavor, VIPA aims to use private investment to bring state-of-the-art amenities, efficient airport operations, and long-term maintenance plan to these two critical assets. Under the contemplated arrangement, the Port Authority will remain the owner of the airports and the recipient of any federal grant funds awarded to either airport.

1:41:30 The selection has been narrowed to four qualified firms responding to a request for qualifications. Final proposals are due in February, and the Port Authority expects to begin work on redeveloping the airport terminals by the first quarter of 2025. At the Cyrillic King Airport, the contractor is progressing on both Phase I and Phase II of the Parking and Transportation Center project. PIPA anticipates that phase one of the project will be open for public use by March. Completion of phase one will make half of the overall parking spaces available on the second and third floors of the garage. Phase two of the project is also expected to be completed within the year. In November, I signed into law Act 87-87, which appropriated \$17 million to the Port Authority for the dredging of the Charlotte of Mali Harbour. This funding is necessary for the long overdue port maintenance to prevent potentially serious safety issues. The dredging of Charlotte and Mali Harbor is vital to the United States Virgin Islands, maintaining its competitive advantage in the market for cruise passengers. It will allow ships as large as the Oasis-class safe entry to berth at the West Indian Company docked in Haven site, thereby increasing passengers, cruise passengers, to the territory. I want to thank this body for working with me to get this 17 million approved.

1:43:04 We have been in constant contact with the Army Corps of Engineers and expect to get the permit by April. The Port Authority is prepared to put the project out to bid once the permits are approved with dredging beginning in January. Now our cargo ports are also in the beginning stages of major expansion and redevelopment. We have partnered with Tropical Shipping and Crowley to successfully apply for \$21.9 million from the U.S. Department of Transportation Maritime Administration, or MARAD, to reconstruct and modernize the cargo handling and storage infrastructure at the Crown Bay Terminal in St. Thomas. This project is now in design and permitting phase. But then, in November, we were blessed again by MARAD, as they announced another award of \$22 million for the enhancement of the Wilfred Bumba Alec Port Transshipment Centre on St. Croix, known to us familiarly as the Containers Port.

- 1:44:02 As we speak, Executive Director Carlton Dow was out of the territory, solidifying our relationship with tropical shipping on these projects. I want to thank him and the dedicated staff of the Virgin Islands Port Authority for their work. Last October, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the EPA, informed the government of the Virgin Islands that testing conducted a few weeks earlier had found alarming levels of lead and copper at several point in WAPA's water distribution system.
- 1:44:44 Immediately, WAPA and the technical team at the Department of Planning and Natural Resources exercised all measures to find the reasoning and validity of these shocking results. Although WAPA has no lead service lines in its distribution system, some samples were found to have exceeded the levels found in places that had lead service lines throughout the system. It is important to note that WAPA routinely tests its water distribution system for lead and copper using the testing protocols required by the same EPA. That testing had never produced results that suggested a system-wide problem with lead and copper. However, However, in the abundance of caution, we issued a no-drink advisory for the potable water system. To receive a federal declaration and access federal technical assistance, we ultimately declared a state of emergency. During that emergency declaration, the EPA began doing sequential testing that adhered to the established protocols for testing for lead and copper.
- 1:46:02 This led to vastly different results that were more in line with the test results that WAPA had previously observed and confirmed. That lead and copper levels were below the levels that would be of cause for concern. It is our firm belief that the original round of testing conducted used incorrect methodology. The apparatus used to collect the samples at the meter box caused tiny shards of metal to become free and contaminate the samples that were sent off for testing. Plainly stated, the way the water samples were collected created misleading results and led to the high levels of lead and copper reported. The proper testing methodology, which took samples from the faucet inside the building, without tampering with the plumbing components, yielded way more accurate results. We allowed the local state of emergency to expire this past December, 60 days after it was declared.
- 1:47:15 The national emergency declaration expires tomorrow. And we will also be rescinding the no drink advisory at that time. Now while we do not believe we have a water crisis caused by the presence of lead and copper in the water distribution system, I want to make sure you all hear what I just said. We do not believe that we have a water crisis caused by the lead and copper in the system. We do acknowledge that water in the parts of the distribution system on both islands are discolored and therefore unfit for consumption. It's been this way for the last 20 years.
- 1:47:56 We have clearly heard the frustration of the residents who have to cope with brown water from their taps. It's simple. We are getting rusty water in areas where we have rusty pipes. But the solution is equally simple. WAPA must replace the rusty pipes. Now, WAPA has completed the Clifton Hill Waterline Rehabilitation Project on St. Croix. The rehabilitation of water lines in Estate Campo Rico is expected to be finished by March, and the replacement of water lines in Estate Hannah's Rest is expected to also start in March. A contract is in negotiation for water line extension and rehabilitation work on Northside Road, also expected to begin in 24.
- 1:48:39 On St. Thomas, progress is being made on waterline extension and projects in Dunu, as well as Nazareth. These projects are part of a program of replacing aging and corroded metal pipes with PVC pipes. This started long before the state of the emergency was even declared on the water system. Several areas of the distribution system have been rehabilitated. However, we are hoping to greatly increase the speed of this system-wide rehabilitation. The FEMA has previously approved the replacement of the substandard sections of the underground waters distribution system in St. Croix as part of the Hurricanes Irma and Maria disaster recovery effort. Last August, WAPA submitted a scope of projects with an estimated cost of approximately \$1 billion for review by FEMA.
- 1:49:33 We expect FEMA to provide a fixed cost offer to fund these projects later this year. A similar effort is being made to gain FEMA support for the replacement of substandard water lines in the St. Thomas as well as the St. John District. These projects represent several years of underground construction and yes the roads will be dug up once again. In the interim WAPA has begun addressing rusty water in the distribution system by adjusting its corrosion control program. This entails inserting an FDA approved food grade additive to the water system that will essentially form a coating within the pipe that prevents further leaching of the rust into the water. This is EPA's strongest recommendation for water systems like ours that are showing signs of aging. For many years WAPA had perfected such a corrosion treatment but they did not make the required adjustment for the new water chemistry when the switch was made from desal water to reverse osmosis as it as a means of water production. They We are now working with subject matter experts to make the necessary corrections and treat the rusting pipes within the system.
- 1:50:45 On the power side, the installation of the four new Watsilla generators at the Randolph-Harley Power Plant represents the project with the greatest potential to reduce costs for all of WAPA's rate payers. These more efficient and reliable generators are now up and running on diesel, which reduces fuel consumption and lowers fuel costs. However, the full

impact will come later this year when the infrastructure necessary for the generators to operate on propane is installed. The new generators will improve WAPA's reliability in the St. Thomas district by providing greater flexibility in responding to changes in WAPA's power generation. This will be solidified by the attached battery energy storage systems, which will help buffer disruptions on the energy grid.

- 1:51:31 This brand-new battery system will provide 9 megawatts of energy storage gathered during periods of low demand and released during peak demand, improved operating costs, and St. Thomas will accrue to the benefit of all WAPA customers' territory-wide. We are making progress in our efforts to buy out VTOL's interest in the propane terminals that supply fuel to WAPA's power-generating facilities. WAPA entered into a contract with VTOL on April 20, 2023, for the acquisition of the terminals and associated infrastructure, and Act 8701 facilitated WAPA's ability to make a good-faith payment to VTOL.
- 1:52:11 Housing and Urban Development HUD agreed that Community Development Block Grant hazard mitigation funds could be used for acquiring the facilities. The application is now undergoing its final environmental review prior to the approval by HUD. We look forward to completing this transaction with the help of HUD and our other federal partners and resolving our obligations to VTOL by the end of the first quarter this year. My friends, I am fully committed to fixing WAPA and restoring its viability as a government agency. Most importantly, changing our perspective and approach to the energy challenges of this territory. It's essential. We are working very diligently to transform the future of energy in the U.S. Virgin Islands. In the years past, our economy and quality of life have been crippled by the oppressive cost of fuel for energy production. That is why we have invested over \$100 million to subsidize the cost of energy to keep the rates from increasing for everybody. Our vision is to reduce the energy burden for all Virgin Islanders, which is at the core of a lot of our challenges. Residents and businesses must have affordable and resilient energy options. We are moving to a future where our power generation will be decentralized with greater reliance on small private power producers. We are also creating opportunities for individuals to produce their own power and purchase their own battery storage. Getting back on track with our renewable energy goals is a critical part of this administration's vision. To this end last year, WAPA approved five power purchase agreements with VI Electron to supply the utility with 58 megawatts of solar power that will include Honeywell battery storage systems. VI Electron is in the process of developing solar-powered electric generating facilities, which they will own and operate on the islands of St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix. Construction has begun on the first of the two solar farms to be built on St. Croix and is expected to be ready to produce solar energy by April. Honeywell is a great example of the type of major multinational
- 1:54:28 corporations that are willing to help with our infrastructure transformation efforts. Tonight, I want to recognize Christian Lauranger of VI Electron and Lucien Bolder, President CEO of Honeywell Industrial Automation. Gentlemen, please stand. Last year, the Public Service Commission also approved the power purchase agreement between WAPA and Advance Power to provide wind energy on St. Thomas. The Bovoni Wind Project should provide more than 15 megawatts of wind power at about 11 cents per kilowatt hour, compared to the 43 cents we are paying now. Property leasing and permitting are underway, and the grid interconnection study is almost complete. Once a notice to proceed is issued by Advanced Power, construction is anticipated to be complete within six months. But the truly exciting opportunities to transform our energy infrastructure go way beyond WAPA. President Biden's Inflation Reduction Act allows the EPA to fund solar for all programs. These are nationwide. These programs aim to give subsidies and financial help to residential rooftop and residential serving community solar projects, benefiting low income and disadvantaged communities. We anticipate \$100 million to be awarded to the US Virgin Islands for this funding allocation. \$100 million. This funding will allow the Energy Office to install photovoltaic or PV systems directly on low-income single-family homes at no cost to the homeowner. It will also allow solar developers to install large community renewable energy facilities or community solar that can provide electricity bill credits to low-income residents who are renters or whose rooftops are not suitable for installing solar. The Virgin Islands Energy Office is currently awaiting approval of this grant award, and
- 1:56:33 we're assured that Uncle Joe is going to seek favor on us. This funding will also support the continuation of the Sun Power Solar Loan Program. This program I told you about last year provides low-interest financing for homeowners who wish to install PV systems and battery storage devices in their homes, in which through paying their utility bill, they can simultaneously repay their loan. In addition to the anticipated Solar for All funding, the Energy Office has another \$64 million in federal grants.
- 1:57:06 That's to advance various energy initiatives. \$14 million has already been awarded. The considerable amount of funding being made available to the territory due to President Biden's climate change agenda will allow us to incentivize residential solar and energy efficient appliances and the adoption of electric vehicles. In addition, we have remarked another \$10 million of electrical grid grant funds for community-focused projects. This grant must be in areas enhancing

energy resilience, improving electrical power systems, or other innovative efforts that contribute to the electrical infrastructure. Small businesses with up to 100 employees, for-profit and non-profit groups, educational institutions, government bodies, and those working with low to moderate income of vulnerable populations can all benefit from this grant these programs will bring us one step closer to witnessing the brian roach administration's vision of a transformed energy future in the virgin islands we want the next generation of virgin island islanders to view energy independence as an achievable and a normal way of life wapa will continue to play a critical role in that energy future its commercial industrial and government clientele will continue to require affordable and reliable power from the utility. WAPA will also play an important role as a supplemental source of energy that backstops the distributed energy connected to the grid. We have already begun the mission of ushering in an energy revolution with WAPA, we will lay a solid foundation this year to get us there.

- 1:58:55 Through tireless advocacy, the Office of Disaster Recovery has successfully increased the anticipate allocations for federal disaster recovery funding from \$8 billion to \$12 billion, with the potential to exceed \$15 billion over the next few years. Of the approximately 1,500 FEMA public assistance projects, 1,500, only 54, remain to be obligated. This encompasses the more complex education, health care, and infrastructure projects.
- 1:59:31 In 2023 alone, more than \$2.6 billion more has been obligated, marking a 138% increase compared to the funds secured in 2022. This brings the total amount of obligated funds to a little over \$8.6 billion, with \$3.1 billion of that already spent. Over the next year, the territory expects about 300 projects to enter various phases of construction, generating over \$500 million in spending. Now that we have successfully convinced the federal government to obligate billions of dollars to aid in the territory's recovery my administration is laser focused on spending those dollars and accelerating the rebuild efforts accordingly i've looked at areas where realignment is necessary to meet this goal to propel the recovery forward on november 20th 2023 the office of disaster recovery executed an agreement with the virgin Island's Housing Finance Authority to manage CDBG-DR or Disaster Recovery Programs and has already transitioned its staff from under the auspices of the Housing Finance Authority to ODR. This effort will allow the territory to accelerate the spending of HUD dollars, foster greater synergy across various projects, and boost the performance of housing programs and infrastructure projects that have fallen behind expectation. Specifically, this change has allowed us to adjust the strategy to the Envision program.
- 2:01:03 Remember that? We've got to get those houses built faster. But we can't do it alone. I want to thank the legislature for passing the authorization in Act 8701 to establish a line of credit to provide the funds needed to advance disaster-related recovery project. Besides the \$45 million loan to WAPA for acquiring the VTOL propane terminal, Sixteen million of the remaining 55 has been utilised to advance other recovery projects. As I said, the government of the Virgin Islands has expended over \$3 billion in disaster recovery funds since Hurricanes Irma and Maria Stock in 2017. That is an impressive and unprecedented average of \$500 million in federal recovery dollars spent annually over the last six years. Prior to the hurricanes, we had never expended that much in contracts in a single year, not even half that much. At this pace, though, it will take us another 20 years to complete the recovery. And that simply ain't good enough. Our goal is to at least double this amount and expend \$1 billion a year solely in disaster recovery funds. But to get there, we cannot continue doing things the traditional way.
- 2:02:24 Frankly, we don't have enough contractors. We don't have enough workers. We don't have enough materials. And we don't have enough housing. We need a significant paradigm shift. And as a result, we are embarking on a new initiative called Rebuild USVI. We're estimating the total cost of reconstruction for the hurricanes to ultimately approach \$15 billion or more. \$15 billion. That is a monumental task for any community to manage.
- 2:02:58 But we only have a workforce of 41,000 people. RebuildUSVI is being developed to expedite the timeline for this massive reconstruction effort. As a core strategy, RebuildUSVI will group many of the top priority recovery projects into billion-dollar bundles for procurement. This initiative has three major goals. One, to attract some of the largest general contractors in the nation who can secure the necessary performance bonds on projects and bring resources and people to the islands.
- 2:03:32 Two, to systematically resolve the logistical challenges and supply chain issues that have driven up project costs, discouraged contractor interests, and slowed recovery efforts. And three, to solidify manpower and capacity issues by transforming our project management office into a super project management office to coordinate high priority recovery projects and be able to have the manpower to do so. Rebuild USVI supercharges the territories disaster recovery to think outside the box and dispense with the bureaucracy that is simply inadequate for our progress. The success of this initiative will allow us to launch several of our largest recovery projects simultaneously and create an ecosystem of economic activity from the resulting construction room. This is the way we facilitate the transformation of a resilient Virgin Islands.

- 2:04:32 In our recovery, our parks are crucial to our successful recovery as any other component of our infrastructure. Parks provide important venues for family-friendly entertainment that promotes physical health and social well-being for our entire community. Parks are where future stars learn their preferred sport and hone their skill. It is where future legends like Aaliyah Boston and Michelle Smith are born, and their stories are told. Here's where multiple generations of Virgin Islanders can find a common joy. This is why we have given these facilities priority in the recovery.
- 2:05:05 The Brian Rocha administration is getting our people outside and back to the parks. On St. Croix, we are concluding repairs to the hurricane damage on Renhold Jackson Park in Wim, Cramus Park Beach, Rudy Krigger in Science Farm, and the Marley Beachfront in Frederickstead. On St. Thomas, repairs are nearing completion at Emile Griffith Park, Curran Terrace Ballpark, and Joseph Aubame Ballpark in Frenchtown. In St. John, repairs have been completed to the Oval Brown Basketball Court and the Cruz Bay tennis courts. A grant agreement between, a grant agreement has been executed with the St. Thomas Cricket Association providing 1.5 million for the development of a cricket pitch and associated facilities in a state Nazareth. We have issued them the first half a million and the construction has already begun. I am pleased to announce that the Clinton Phipps racetrack is in fact on track Southland Southland gaming has honored its commitments and fulfill this obligation I will be giving out the governor's cup at carnival races this year yeah I want to thank I want to thank those legislature who took the stance to support rebuilding the Clinton FIPS racetrack, and also to the owner of Southland Gaming, Mr. Robert Bobby Huckabee, their senior vice president, Mr. Shane Gaspard, and my good friend, Mr. Jason Charles, for bold leadership, because bold leadership is necessary for the progress, and that's what we have.
- 2:06:45 Now, I wish I could make a similar pronouncement for horse racing on the island of St. Croix. Although construction, I saw a crane out there moving around, has just begun, VIGL simply has not made the necessary progress to return horse racing to the big island. Now my administration has taken every step necessary to bring the leaf to our horsemen and racing fans.
- 2:07:17 We even went as far as giving and granting \$5 million to VIGL towards the completion of the track. We have approved the necessary building permits and leases. We have given concession after concession, but yet no substantial signs of progress. Tonight, I am publicly urging VIGL to make good on their commitment to this government, to our horse racing enthusiasts on St. Croix, and to the people of these Virgin Islands, there's simply no more concessions that can be granted. In pursuing excellence, setting goals is the foundation of personal and academic growth. The students of the Virgin Islands exemplify excellence as they strive for success.
- 2:08:18 Attention to students' academic achievement and effective strategies to address learning loss resulting not only from the disruption of the 2017 hurricanes, but also the pandemic is imperative. However, these discussions cannot overshadow the very real concerns that our faculties and students face regarding the physical condition of our schools. heard me say before the straightforward truth is the schools are just showing their age and they become harder and harder to maintain each year I wish I could just magically provide brand new schools but the real solutions require significantly more effort that's why we set up the new school advisory board to implement the educational facility master plan through their help we are now having a clear strategy for the replacement or extensive renovation of of all of our school campuses. Construction of the first FEMA-funded replacement project, the new Arthur Richards K-8 school commenced in February 2023 and is expected to be substantially completed by the spring of 26. The first phase of the Gladys Abraham modernization project was completed by custom builders in September 23. This will become the new site of the Wheatley Skills Center on St. Thomas. In September, solicitations were concluded for three additional school projects. The design services for St. Croix Central High School have been awarded to MCN Build, while design services for St. Thomas Charlotte and Mali High School and the modernization of Bertha C. Bushelti Middle School have been awarded to the joint firm of Consigli Banton. All these projects are scheduled to begin in 24. Schematic designs are now being developed for Alexander Henderson Elementary School, Claudio Marco, St. Croix Educational Complex, the renovation
- 2:10:12 of Lockhart Elementary and Edith L. Williams Alternative Academy. Additionally FEMA has also recently announced that they have obligated 133 million in federal grant funding for the rebuilding of the Julia Sprout School on St. John. The acquisition of the 11-acre parcel in Estate Catherinburg from the National Park Service finally provides us with the perfect location for the construction of this modern-day campus. After 50 years, I acknowledge the frustration and concerns of those St. Jonians that believe that the National Park has not been a good neighbor and perhaps intruded on the quality of life of the native residents. I understand those concerns that St. Jonians have raised regarding unreasonable federal restrictions and, in some cases, the unfair treatment by the National Park. These are issues that Tregenza and I have discussed directly with both present and former park superintendents, as well as two of the secretaries of the interior, both Deb Haaland and Dave Bernard.

- 2:11:31 Tregenza went personally with a team to see them. I assure you, we are committed to be advocates on behalf of the people of St. John. But I also listen very intently to the concerns of students and former students, talking about their experiences and the hardships of attending high school as a resident of St. John. I have listened to them explain the extra effort and commitment that has been required of them over the years just to go to school. It is something that I believe we all agree needs to be addressed.
- 2:12:07 It is unfair, and it puts them at a disadvantage compared to their colleagues residing on St. Thomas and St. Croix. That is why we have moved resolutely and with intentionality to resolve the issue of public high school on the island of St. John. That is why we have fought to secure the investment of \$133 million that FEMA is willing to provide toward this effort. That is why I am so grateful to the leadership of this body for passing the legislation that authorizes us to close this transaction. I want to thank you legislators for that leadership immensely. Together, we have written a momentous chapter in Virgin Islands history by reclaiming a critical piece of property from the National Park Service for the use and benefit of all Virgin Islanders. Not only will we get a new school, but a third of that property will be held by our territorial park system, and the balance will be used to educate the children of the Virgin Islands. This marks the largest public sector investment ever made on the island of St. John, a noteworthy accomplishment achieved. Together, I am thankful for your support, especially to Senate President Nobel Francis Jr. and Senator Ángel Bolkis Jr. for their incredible leadership.
- 2:13:51 As controversial as it may have been in 2023, history will view this as a pivotal moment in the development of improved quality of life for all our people in St. John. This year, we'll also find us making a fundamental shift in the structure of the Department of Education. We are on the verge of launching the Bureau of School Construction and Maintenance, led by an experienced and qualified facilities maintenance professional. This professional will also take responsibility for construction and major maintenance from the Department of education. This is an initiative championed by Senator Donna Fred Gregory and passed by this body.
- 2:14:42 We need, we must, we need to have our trained educators focus on student instruction, not building construction. The key determinant of success in everything we aspire to accomplish is a well-educated community. The Virgin Islands Department of Education is actively implementing its strategic plan to enhance public education. This plan focuses on four goals, all of them related to student achievement. One, ensuring we have quality schools. Two, fostering an effective education that produce self-sufficient adults.
- 2:15:20 Three, engaging our families. And four, building a supportive community. Each of our schools have developed improvement plans, detailing strategies to enhance students' performance, with \$250,000 allocated to each principal to facilitate that implementation. That's a far cry from the \$25,000 they used to get in the past. School-based teams have now been charged with closing achievement gaps and improving student outcomes through redeployment of tools like iReady and Apps for Gaps. We are putting the power of change at the school-based level. The administration, we remain focused on, cradle to career. The Department of Education has put extreme focus on the foundational level of pre-kindergarten through third grade to ensure that students read proficiently. We encourage that the Smarter Balanced assessment data reveals that third graders have not shown regression in reading or math.
- 2:16:27 Pre-K classes have been implemented in schools, and those cohorts are being closely tracked. Moreover, the dropout rate has reduced, decreased, from 4.9% in 2022 to 2.8 in 23, while graduation rates have actually improved from 74% to 78%. Plans are in place to ensure that every single 12-grade student has a goal for college, for technical school, military or prepared to meet the workplace. Now, while we must focus our attention on the challenges confronting public education, there are always examples of great student achievement that continue to make us all proud. Last summer, 14 students received the opportunity to study pre-law, pre-med, and business at Harvard. Yes, Harvard University. William Mattire from Ivana Edora, Ken High School, won the best business plan in the business program. And Alondra James from Charlotte Amali High School won the best prosecuting attorney in the pre-law program. At Harvard, 10 students attended Yale University's summer springboard travel high school program with Rodney Moorhead, Jr.
- 2:17:35 Y'all know the name? From the St. Croix Educational Complex receiving the outstanding award for business. And Alarie Monsanto receiving the award for emergency medicine. Jeremy Bello, the drum major at Alabama A&M, and a graduate of our very own Ivana Edora Kent High School recently led the first HBCU school to participate in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in Manhattan. I ain't done yet. We're going to talk about the stars tonight. We're always talking about the bottom. At Ricardo Richards Elementary School, Ms. Alliser's fifth grade scholars have been on an incredible journey of discovery by designing and building their own cars. Utilizing a systematic approach to design, these young minds are bursting with excitement and enthusiasm as they delve into the world of engineering.

- 2:18:29 These are our children, and they are excelling everywhere. Throughout our public school system, you can find examples of talented and dedicated teachers producing exceptional scholars. This evening, we have two of the finest examples with us. Ms. Chevelle Simeon, an advanced placement English literature composition teacher at Charlotte of Mali High School, who has been honored as St. Thomas St. John's Teacher of the Year, and Ms. Chiselle McConnell, a foreign language teacher, and a department chair in the foreign language department at the St. Croix Complex High School, who has been recognized personally. I went to the class myself. You should have seen it.
- 2:19:15 as the Teacher of the Year from the St. Croix district. Please join me in celebrating their awesome success educating our kids. I made sure I went this year to the classrooms. I didn't want this to be the first time I met them. Now, it's not always easy to do the work that you do. And we all know that the conditions are real challenging. But our best and our brightest teachers persevere and find a way to be brilliant every day.
- 2:19:57 We continue to invest in early childhood care and education. Projects under Head Start program, backed by 42 million in disaster recovery grant, are advancing consistently. In 2023, six locations, Anna's Hope, Concordia, Olungo, Limburg Bay, Mineta Mitchell, and Cruz Bay, concluded solicitations with work commencing in August. Demolition is underway and completed for most of these facilities, with contractors working to complete construction of six brand new head starts this year. Y'all think that's normally going on, eh?
- 2:20:41 A large part of our continued strategy to ensure that our graduates are both college and career ready for the jobs for America's graduate program. JAG is a national nonprofit that deploys a model in 40 states, 40 states designed to keep young people in school through graduation and improve their success in education and career. as a Vice Chair, as a National Board of Directors. I am extremely proud of this program and the success that they have across the territory and nationwide. We now have eight programs, having doubled in size under my administration. The Leadership Development Conference saw the participation of 186 students. 120 seniors will participate in a paid 12 week work-based learning partnership with the Department of Labor. The Virgin Islands has received awards for its outstanding performance for two consecutive years, highlighting the significance of investing in our students for the future. That is what we did when we started the GVI Financial Fellows Program. We offered young people just out of college the opportunity to gain real-world experience with a big paycheck, \$55,000 a year. This is a paid two-year internship in the government of the Virgin Islands. The first cohort of students graduated last year.
- 2:22:02 And numerous of these graduates of the program are already finding success in permanent jobs. Young people like Department of Human Services, Financial Analyst Robert Tirado, and Office of Disaster Recovery, Financial Analyst Lenique Williams. Stand up, let them see who you are, young people. you have to invest to get returns after years of people complaining about a drain brain you see our young people shine in we want to ensure that our students receive a strong start from birth all the way through their public education journey and ready for the wall if there's one thing I am passionate about you know is reading in 2024 we began a campaign to bring our libraries library facilities back online we will continue to champion programs to promote latest literacy provide flexible spaces for community engagement and bridge the diva digital divide by providing easy access to online resources getting so excited our goal is for like all library facilities to operate at extended hours on weekends I'm pleased to announce this evening that after receiving 1.8 million in extensive repairs and hazard mitigation measures the Florence Williams Library in Christianstead is reopening in February to add the Athalie McFarlane Peterson Library in Frederickstead will be open at the end of this year on St. John we saw the hiring of new staff and the opening of the Elaine Ione Sprout Public Library the Turnbull library closed in August to undergo extensive renovation work but it too will be open later this year now I had the pleasure of dining with the auction winner in support of St. Croix's Children Museum this past December. And I was sitting there doing our dinner, I was introduced to DPNR's newest initiative and it's called Hoopla. Hoopla is set to launch next month grandly. What is Hoopla? It hopes to bridge the digital divide by putting our Virgin Islands public library at the fingertips
- 2:24:17 of every Virgin Islands student and adult with just a library card. Everyone will have access to borrow and enjoy audiobooks, ebooks, comics, movies, and so much more. And all you will need to access platform is a screen for free. Tonight, it pleased me to say that as of March of last year, the JFL North Temporary Hospital facility open on St. Croix. This state-of-art \$130 million facility accommodates St. Croix residents during demolition and reconstruction of the Governor Juan F. Louis Hospital. Currently there's still four additional projects necessary for the complete decommissioning of the former hospital. Once completed the demolition of existing storm dam of the existing storm damage structure can begin. This past May FEMA announced that they have allocated over 800 million dollars towards the new permanent facility. The Department of Health is currently managing more than 300 million in disaster recovery projects. These were awarded for the rebuilding of four different facilities. The Women, Infant and Children Center at Nude Hansom which is complete. The WIC building in Frederickstead which is under construction. The Charles Howard Memorial Complex which is going through demolition and the Eldra Shelterbent Mental Health Facility on St. Thomas,

which is in design. We are eager to start serving our residents in these new and modern health spaces. In 2023, after a successful battle with COVID-19, with more than 56,000 Virgin Islanders immunized and minimal loss of life, we transitioned from pandemic to endemic. However, COVID's impact exposed long-standing health disparities, emphasizing the urgent need to fundamentally change the way health programs are delivered the future of public health is centered on health equity predicting and preventing illnesses at the community level lessens the disease severity that will serve to reduce the economic burden of our health care most namely the unfunded care at the hospitals the pandemic also pushed us into the digital age with

- 2 : 26 : 31 public health increasingly dependent on automation and integrated systems for comprehensive program and service delivery today the department of health and our office of health information technology are actively reimagining the public health landscape in the territory we are making progress in making healthcare more accessible to our resident for the first time in decades residents in the territory have access to individual health plans from the newly admitted insurance carrier caribbean group this means an individual without belonging to an employer's group plan can get insurance. This insurer will offer individual private medical care insurance coverage, filling the long-standing void in the health insurance market. We are excited about the potential for this development to reduce the uninsured population. Lieutenant Governor Tregenzi Roach and his staff have done an excellent work in searching for this opportunity for us.
- 2 : 27 : 32 the country continues to grapple with a mental health crisis exacerbated by the isolation fears and uncertainties resulting from the pandemic this crisis affects us all all our generations but has been especially devastating to our young people last year the department of health stepped up its effort to address mental health concerns in the territory doh held its annual children's mental health summit territory-wide to engage stakeholders in developing solutions the behavioral health clinic saw 790 patients and made school presentations to more than 3 800 students across the territory overall our behavioral health outreach efforts have touched over 23 000 individuals as of november 2023 last july the the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline launched 988 as nationwide. Easy to remember the three-digit dialing code for people in crisis.
- 2 : 28 : 33 The Department of Health has implemented the 988 lifeline. The 664 contacts were made to the line from Virgin Islanders between January and November alone. The lifeline connects those experiencing a suicidal crisis or mental health-related distress to confidential emotional support from the counselors. The goal this year is to hire interventionists to allow for local answering of the lifeline. If the 664 contacts made to this number this past year do not align you, then the four confirmed suicides we had last year should.
- 2 : 29 : 16 Never before we've seen this in the territory. But perhaps the greatest public health challenge facing our community is the persistent epidemic of gun violence. Tonight, we honor the memory of Detective Delbert Phipps Jr., who was killed in a line of duty on July 4. Last year, we revere his selfless sacrifice and dedication to the service and his service to this community. Likewise, we commend all those men and women who have chosen a career in law enforcement and conduct themselves with competence and professionalism.
- 2 : 30 : 02 Last year, we added another 37 offers to their rank. We are grateful for your heroism as you keep the peace and protect our community. Gun violence... Gun violence is a leading cause of premature death in the U.S. for African Americans between the ages of 15 and 24. We are witnessing individuals in our community with a complete inability to control their anger or to resolve conflicts with civility. It is an urgent behavioral health, behavioral health concern for predominantly brown and black communities like ours. We understand the trauma, the fear and anxiety that many of our residents live with because of violent crime.
- 2 : 30 : 48 We have heard the community cries for more prevention programs and work support for our young people. Our focus has been proactively intervening in the lives of people who are most at risk of being either the perpetrators or the victims of violent crime. The Office of Gun Violence Prevention has taken on the challenge of addressing the root causes of gun violence in our communities. This work involves planting the seeds to facilitate the long-term reduction of violence by mentoring at-risk youths, conducting community activities, making presentations in our schools, and assisting individuals with getting gainful employment and getting their lives on track. The Office maximizes its effectiveness through partnerships with Project Safe Neighborhoods, the National Network for Safer Communities, various government departments and others. In the short term, the Office of Gun Violence Prevention conducts walk and talks on the turfs, assists parents with unruly children, and intervenes in incidents to prevent retaliation.
- 2 : 31 : 57 This past year alone, the Office of Gun Violence intervened in at least six potential retaliatory attacks that could have led to further violence and potential homicides they have de-escalated numerous conflicts and prevented them from coming to violent conclusions it is always difficult to quantify the bad things that didn't happen but if even one homicide was presented isn't it worthy of our acknowledgment and our support. Our Virgin Islands Police Department has been making substantial strides in its crime-fighting capacity. Thanks to a measure sponsored by Senator Diane Capehart and passed

by this body, we will be developing a real-time crime center to monitor our growing network of closed-circuit surveillance cameras. The use of technology and camera system has played an integral role in over 30 cases in the Virgin Islands, leading to arrests and closing vehicle accident investigations. Contracts are in place to add additional cameras to our schools, our roadways, our recreational parks to protect our people. We also added assets on the marine front with the purchase of two renegade go-fast vessels that have been in operation in St. Croix since July. The St. Thomas units build-out is scheduled for completion in May. Through the assistance of our Delegate to Congress, Stacey Plaskett, the VIPD has received an additional \$4 million congressional appropriation for the purchase of three more of these Go Fast vessels, one for each island.

2:33:43 As our marine industry grows, so should our enforcement capacity. But a large part of our crime prevention strategy is focused on discouraging convicted criminals from reoffending. We know that when provided with the appropriate support, previously incarcerated individuals can transform to rehabilitated citizens who contribute to our workforce. We have partnered with Align Community Inc. to ensure inmates get the wraparound services they need to be productive upon release. They will get workforce training and assistance with career placement. In addition, they will receive mentorship and counseling and be part of a cohort where they will receive additional support from peers and professionals on their transition back into society. This program complements the re-entry program that begins in the Bureau of Corrections. The equine therapy program, which began last August, harnesses the therapeutic essence and our cultural love of horses. This groundbreaking program at the John Bell Correctional Facility has witnessed its first 11 graduates having experienced a journey of emotional healing and personal growth the bureau has also collaborated with happy homes to unveil the first transitional home on its campus they actually have houses on campus at the correctional facility with two more on the way this is significant because sometimes when inmates are released they don't have anywhere to go Second chances don't just benefit the individual, they benefit our entire community.

2:35:24 We all know when the mainland sneezes the territories catch the cold. The economic and social issues plaguing the continent of the United States are slowly creeping their way into the territory. Our Department of Justice has tirelessly confronted many of these issues through vigorous prosecution. Although the fight against human trafficking, sexual abuse, the proliferation of opioid abuse and tax evasion continues, the Department of Justice has demonstrated that it is up to the task. Through its effort, the Department of Justice has secured more than \$1 million in opioid settlements and judgments to combat this growing epidemic. This will be administered through the Department of Health. The national opioid epidemic that started in the late 90s is now an active problem in this territory. Fentanyl, a synthetic opioid that is up to 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times stronger than morphine, is a major contributor to fatal overdoses in the US. Unfortunately, it is now here in the territory.

2:36:37 Last year, there were three confirmed deaths due to fentanyl overdoses. Three deaths are three too many. This month, the Division of Behavioural Health hosted a planning meeting for a territory-wide opioid overdose prevention task force to centre community engagement and address this growing crisis. I urge each of you and our entire community to get educated on the dangers and actively discourage our families and friends from abusing fentanyl and other opioids. We must not shy away from the ugliest parts of our community, but instead be resolute in our efforts to address them head on. Human trafficking and sexual and bruise are real and present threats to our community. The territory has now received settlement funds resulting from human trafficking litigation, including proceeds from the sale of Great St. James, Little St. James, and other direct funds. These settlement funds include \$20 million to support services to vulnerable, disenfranchised individuals, and community organizations to address social ills, including sex trafficking, human trafficking, mental health initiatives, domestic violence, and poverty. An additional \$25 million will supplement prosecution and enforcement measures within the territory. Fifteen more million will be allocated to mental health services. Last August, legislation strengthening support for human trafficking victims, including mandatory reporting requirements, was forwarded to the 35th legislature for action. The proposed legislation recognizes and allocates an additional \$11 million specifically to be used to combat human trafficking in the territory. Tonight, I implored this body to act on this legislation. The rollout of legalized cannabis industry in the Virgin Islands continues to make progress. This administration remains adamant about bringing the growth, sale, and purchase of cannabis to a legal and properly regulated market. This includes the first of its kind in the entire United States, a pathway to legal cannabis for sacramental use. I have also recently submitted to the legislature pertinent technical amendments to 8680 to address some of the remaining issues with the existing law. Tonight I am pleased to announce the launch of the Cannabis Registry Program starting with

2:39:00 the medical practitioners and sacramental organizations being allowed to register. This will be followed by patient and sacramental users to begin in early April. Additionally, just a few months ago, 50 Virgin Islanders participated in cannabis training courses, including horticultural training, extraction and manufacturing and bud tending, ensuring that our community is prepared and educated to take advantage of this industry. By early September 2024, we expect to issue

the inaugural license for dispensaries, cultivation and processing. Finally, the need to ensure that everyone can participate in this new industry makes the work of the Auto Expungement Task Force vital. The task force has been assembled and is working meticulously to expunge the criminal records of those who were previously convicted of simple possession and other related marijuana statutes. We are utilizing the best practice from the experience of other U.S. jurisdictions to develop this industry in the right way. Since the creation of the Supreme Court in 2006, we have been served by three exceptional justices. As part of the continued growth of our Virgin Islands judiciary, tonight I wish to announce my intention to add another exceptional jurist to their ranks by nominating the Honorable Harold L. Willocks to be a justice of the Virgin Islands Supreme Court.

2:40:40 Judge Willocks is no stranger to the bench and the judicial community after serving more than two terms as a judge in the Superior Court. His prior public service includes previously serving as the presiding judge of the Superior Court, Chief Public Defender, and Assistant Attorney General. Judge Willocks is a consummate public servant, published author, and son of the soil. I'm confident that he will be a wonderful addition to the Supreme Court as an astute and deliberative justice.

2:41:10 Last year, the Virgin Islands Housing Authority completed the renovation of 82 public housing units at Walter I.M. Hodge Pavilion in Frederickstead. Some of those units have been abandoned since 2000, 20 years. This is the first phase of the eventual renovation of 248 units at that site. The total project represents over 116 million dollars being invested in upgrading affordable housing in Frederickstead. Large infrastructure projects like these are important drivers of our economy. Not only does it provide much-needed affordable housing in the territory, but it also provides substantial employment for our people.

2:42:01 People like Jose Solis, a labourer, and Billy Navarro, a labourer, now apprenticed as heavy equipment mechanic, both are residents of this community and both are employed by the prime contractor, Jay Benton Construction. We are tireless in our home ownership for Virgin Islanders, and in our pursuit opportunities, we continue to promote our VI Slice program. VI Slice is a gap financing program administered by the EDA that helps eligible Virgin Islanders buy, build, and renovate their first home. It provides grants, not loans, grants of up to \$200,000 for the purchase or construction of a home, and up to \$100,000 for down payment and closing costs.

2:42:50 Since the program's launch in October 22, the VIEDA has executed a member of agreement with six local mortgage lenders. Two of those lenders, Banco Popular de Puerto Rico and Merchants Commercial Bank, are offering construction loans. To date, VIESLICE has helped nine local families in the U.S. Virgin Islands purchase their first home. have closed on St. Croix and two closed on St. Thomas. As of December, there are 147 applications for homeowners assistance fund mortgage program. Funded with eight and a half million dollars from ARPA, the Housing Finance Authority paid out 918,000 in direct assistance to 70 qualified households. These funds provided relief for homeowners who experienced financial hardship during the pandemic and were used for mortgage reinstatements mortgage payments mortgage principal reduction cases of foreclosure delinquent property taxes and insurance just to name a few we are steadfast in helping virgin islanders achieve and keep the goal of home ownership the revitalization of our downtowns is a passionate goal of this administration last year we were encouraged and helped tremendously by the private sector Whether it was Chris Pardo or Peter Zilke in Christianstead, Shamari Moorhead or John Alexander in Fedrickstead, or Charles Kim, Uri Cohen or Pash Daswani in Charlotte Amali, our private partners are stepping up. We continue to support their investments by installing modern infrastructure and public amenities that help sustain commercial activity. We remain dedicated to the ongoing enhancements to our towns and the surrounding areas. We successfully completed road rehabilitation, drainage, and safety improvements on all roads

2:44:48 in Frederickstead, except for King, Queen, and Strand. Those three streets will finally be addressed this year, with federal highway funds finally eliminating the images of flooding streets with heavy rains. Christian Sedas has undergone extensive modernization of its underground utilities in the last few years. WAPA completed the replacement of its water lines in 21. Most recently, the Waste Management Authority completed a considerable upgrade of its wastewater system. That upgrade solved many issues we have experienced over the years with clogged sewer lines and overflowing manholes running sewer into the streets. Unfortunately, the constant excavation in the area has left the Christian said roads in admittedly terrible condition however we must be reminded that progress is disruptive and a period of disruption is necessary to make way for prosperity to have resilient and modern infrastructure we have to dig up a few roads having said that the Department of Public Works is standing by with a contract in place to begin the full repair and pavement of of Queen, Market, Prince, East, and Hill Streets in Christensen as soon as this wastewater project is complete. In Charlotte Amalia, another long-standing project is coming to fruition. The overall design for Veterans Drive 2A is in final design review stages by the Federal Highway Administration. As a 2022 Department of Transportation RAISE grant, this project is one of 42 projects nationwide selected to expedite processing to ensure that the notice to proceed

occurs this year. That's the highway that comes around the legislature and connects to Veterans Drive. Now it has been a consensus for quite some time that the key to restoring our vitality to our downtown is to restore residential living to the towns. Truly creating live work and

2:46:50 place spaces. Unfortunately, many of the residential structures within our towns that formerly housed some of our founding and most prominent families are now abandoned and dilapidated. While there is a shortage of properties available for home buyers and renters, we have hundreds of homes across the territory sitting in disrepair, some admittedly beyond the point of repair. If we can successfully address those properties that are being neglected, it will not only remedy the blighted condition of our towns and our neighborhoods, but it would also help reduce the cost of residential rental rates throughout the territory. That is why, earlier today, my office submitted to this body the Brian Roach Administration proposal for addressing abandoned and derelict buildings in our towns and neighborhoods.

2:47:47 This proposal is rooted in a property conservatorship model that is designed to remedy blight while protecting communities from the ill effects of gentrification. Let me say that again. If we wanted to take the properties we could, they owe taxes on them. We want to keep it in our families to protect our communities from the ill effects of gentrification. In developing this proposal, we have gathered public and private stakeholder input. We held public town hall meetings in both districts.

2:48:26 Finally, after presenting the concept, we continued to gather public comments until the final draft proposal was prepared. I want to thank all the engaged residents who took the time and effort to read the draft and proposal and formally submit comments. They were good comments. But the proposal now stands before, the proposal now before the Senate reflects broad input and consensus on an approach tailored to meet our community's needs and concerns. But before this proposal was even publicly distributed, there were attempts to politicize the matter with misinformation and fear-mongering. Some attempted to put a cloud of suspicion over the proposal and build opposition for the sake of opposition. However, buried in all of that noise was a real and legitimate concern regarding potential gentrification of Virgin Islanders being dispossessed of their properties.

2:49:23 I heard those concerns, loud and clear. I also heard from Virgin Islanders who own property or have property in their families that they would appreciate seeing it restored, those who want to do right by the property they have inherited, Those who know their siblings will never agree on a path forward, or that the absentee property owner is unconcerned and oblivious to the conditions of the property back home. All these voices were heard, considered, and ultimately resulted in the proposal which is now before the legislature. Some have suggested that this matter is too controversial and complex to successfully build consensus. I disagree. We are all motivated to solve a problem that is becoming increasingly obvious and persistent.

2:50:13 It's not just a matter of the properties being held up in probate. Even when ownership is free and clear, we have property owners who are unable or unwilling to prevent their properties from falling into disrepair. We must find a way to help those property owners, help themselves. Nothing, nothing is too complicated, is so complicated that cannot be simplified by hard work. The Honorable Bernhard said it, and I believe it. So senators, let's get to work on solving the problem of abandoned and neglected, derelict buildings in our towns and in our neighborhoods.

2:50:57 I look forward to the legislative hearings to come. If you need me to come down here, I'm ready to stand by too. We stand ready to testify on our proposal and work along with you to develop the best solution for our people. On July 3rd, we celebrated the 175th anniversary of the emancipation of enslaved Africans and their descendants in the Danish West Indies. The Emancipation Commemoration Commission organized a year-long observance of the events and implications of that historic occasion. I want to thank the Commission's Chair, Carol Burke, Senator Carla Joseph, and the other Commission members for ensuring that all residents of this Virgin Allens acknowledge this critical and momentous part of history and the evolution of our people.

2:51:57 We have certainly come a long way since 1848. Many of us are the descendants of enslaved Africans that resided right here in the Danish West Indies, on the United States mainland, or elsewhere in the Caribbean. As a people predominantly of color, we have progressed tremendously from the inhumane cruelty and unforgivable sin of chateau slavery. In fact, we may have progressed so far over the years that we now take some of those gains for granted.

2:52:36 There was a time in these islands when education opportunities for people of color were limited. That is why I am worried that our residents are not capitalizing on the opportunity for a free college education, free college education being provided at the University of the Virgin Islands. There was a time when people of color did not own property. Each successive generation of residents of these islands strived to make property ownership much more attainable. That is why it is heartbreaking to see some property owners demonstrate an absence of pride by allowing their properties to become overgrown or filled with trash.

- 2:53:20 There was a time when our ancestors were not valued. That is why I'm concerned that we associate with and enable violent criminals who similarly place little value on life. There was a time when we did not have the right to elect our leaders. They were selected for us. So I have grown uneasy that too many of us enjoy the spectacle of politics but never personally get involved in making this community better for ourselves and our neighbors.
- 2:54:07 We have certainly earned the right, through many years of struggle, to choose to have a callous disregard for history and the sacrifices of our ancestors. But I think we all know that if that becomes our collective choice, then it doesn't bode well for our future.
- 2:54:38 The government certainly has a role to play. And as government leaders, we must cede to the well-being of all Virgin Islanders. But that does not absolve us from doing our part as individuals. From my first state of the territory address to this present moment, I remain very optimistic about the future of these islands. I firmly believe luck is when opportunity meets preparedness. Over the last few years, our preparedness has met the opportunities leading us to positive outcomes and benefits. And while we are making great progress in keeping the promises we've made to the people of the Virgin Islands, we are still constrained by our resources.
- 2:55:42 As a result, that progress has required difficult decisions. Whether you're the head of your household or the head of state like me, leadership requires setting priorities and making uncomfortable but prudent decisions. To save the GRS system from insolvency, we have had to forego the revenues generated by the rum excise cover over and the capital projects they funded. To keep the cost of electricity manageable, we had to forego additional road repairs. To catch up on the backlog of income tax reforms, we have had to live with a less than ideal budget for facility maintenance.
- 2:56:30 However, through those sacrifices, our commitment has always been and will continue to be to provide the best possible quality of life for Virgin Islanders and to create abundant opportunities for Virgin Islands prosperity. Senators, we may not always see eye to eye, but I trust we share a common vision for our community. Let us work together to connect our people with opportunities that are being produced right here at home.
- 2:57:09 Together, let's promote responsible citizenship, build stronger families, cultivate a thriving economy, and transform our infrastructure. Let us continue to be resolute in our pursuit of progress for this territory, moving forward one step at a time. God bless you, and God bless the Virgin Islands. Love you. please remain in place until the governor leaves the chamber thank you very much governor for your presentation on the state of the territory this evening god bless you as well Please be seated.
- 2:58:34 Please recognize the departure of Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach. Thank you, Lieutenant Governor. Have a good night. Thank you.
- 2:59:34 At this time, we will recognize the departure of our Delegate to Congress, Stacey Plaskett. Judiciary, ready? You ready? justice and you can lead the judiciary at this time out. Thank you, good evening.
- 3:00:33 And they will be followed by the governor's cabinet, again led by chief of staff, Karl Good night. pastor reverend um you you could leave as well as our teachers of the year you can just follow right behind the dumb notice cabinet.
- 3:02:15 All semi-autonomous, autonomous agencies, have a good evening. Thank you.
- 3:03:15 At this time, the session of January 22, 2024, is hereby adjourned. God bless each and every one of you, and the media, the rest of the audience can stand by you certainly have the response by our legislators momentarily what do you think what you think you think we just got you the governor's state of the territory a lot a lot of information a whole lot of information what are your thoughts what are your initial thoughts uh initial thoughts um well we we did head this seemed to be very heavy on the state of our economy i think we were seeing so much things about numbers we've seen finances this seemed to have been much heavier on the economy than what i believe it was last year i know last year what it was it was like hey we have the money this is always you know this is what it is and i'm thinking now it's here's money this is how we're going to use it this is how we're going to spend it so it did seem very very heavy on the economy um maybe not to say less focus on other things but i'd say the number one thing that i got out of this is that you know this is the economy and we're going to be a little you know we're focusing on that you know that's going to be our main thing that we're
- 3:05:09 going to be doing agreed agreed um like i said we have some other topics that i was expecting to hear um definitely definitely the finances we just came out of our finance meeting on friday so i definitely was looking forward to that obviously um uh healthcare being here we heard about the hospital we didn't get into detail as to where we are with that um definitely roads infrastructures uh you mentioned some of the stuff on st croix with the lights and what's not so it was good conversation but to be said we wanted to get more in depth into some of the stuff that we really actually going through the water situation that's a that's a major thing um education as well um the curriculum and and how we um plan

to deal with these kids where it is that they had the time off with the the covid and stuff like that so very interesting conversations i'm looking forward to hear where the senators are going to take it. I'm not going to say, I know there's a lot of information, but we're going to query them and see, you know, what's their thoughts as to whether how the governor's speech was, what kind of grade people would definitely get. What do you think?

3:06:16 Yeah, I have similar thoughts. And like you did say, when it comes to things like state of the territory, this is a very, it's a very broad thing. It's very broad. It's very extensive. So I think probably by design, we will not get to hear every single thing that we would expect to hear i mean we're going to probably highlight what we believe is the most important thing maybe if you know put up put ourselves in the governor's shoes you know we cannot highlight every single thing yeah it's it's it's a huge government it's a lot is going on in this government so yeah i i would say hey we cannot expect you to talk about every single thing that is that's unheard of that's never going to happen but we know that there are the other the major concerns of this government you know major things all all over the place so we we we i think we all know what we want to hear and i i would like to hear what the senators would say about what they also have yes they have their responsibility as our legislators the different committees have to deal with with what they have to do with the kp based on your speech so a lot of that we want to get into with them as the future plans especially in the next year the state of the territory is annually so we went through the list of last year um to see what it is we spoke about um we went through this one and there's a big difference a big difference in tone like i said we mentioned before um this one is more about what we're doing with this money with the ksb and and like i said from just listening to his speech we're talking about billions and billions billions billions and billions and dollars so um we're looking forward to to new schools we're looking forward to the completion of our hospitals all these things that we're looking forward to but i know we are on the way we are on the right path to get there with the case sometimes it feels a little slow coming from the government with the case but we we won't work for them we won't understand what that process is and what's not so um but it's good information for me to have the discussion about what the ksb um i don't didn't see the protesters they were still outside um i would like to get some of the reactions from them as well as to where it is that they was focused on what it is they were looking for as well um but so far like i say um but so far i give him a i give him a big maybe i think i wanted to get some more impact about what it is you were saying but so far

3:08:42 but we'll listen to the sentences and and see how they react to some of his comments and some of his some of the ways you have to say for the state of the territory yes um i i think i would probably read similarly because once again we we do expect to hear specific things i guess all of the things that are particularly playing us in the virgin islands we're expecting to hear things about you know economy education um tourism that's all the things that i think we expect to hear about but maybe the things that we probably wouldn't expect to hear about we would we would want to hear about those things as well because once again it's a it's a huge government it's a very broad government there's so many little pieces that come together to make this government so i think it's it's always good to get that entire that entire piece right right also they did one of my one of the things that i was looking forward to hear was also the the slice program and and it seems to be it seems to be moving but seems to be moving slow you know i think we only got x amount of um i think maybe nine families that that invested in so far invested in that um which like Like I said, I would like to hear maybe 90 or maybe 100 people by the name of that program with the KSB So looking forward to hearing from that as well That's a way for us to get a piece of the rock with the KSB We're working for the government, we don't put in X amount a year We could look forward to that, especially this generation Like we spoke about earlier, our parents, their generation was completely different compared to what it is that we have now You could probably get a house and a piece of land back then for maybe 20,000,000.

3:10:29 Yes, and like we spoke about earlier, I remember one time I was, you know, I'm ironing my clothes for work. I live in a house that was built in, I think, 1974. I was ironing my clothes for work. I found the old loan documents that my grandparents signed to get the house that I live in. And I believe the loan document was for about \$40,000. Let's be honest, I don't think you can even buy a house for \$40,000 in the Virgin Islands now. Especially on St. Thomas.

3:11:03 You're lucky if you get land for \$40,000. So these type of capacity issues, I've been looking for empowering us as young entrepreneurs and young workers for the government as well. So we could see, get a piece of the price, so we could get a little more ownership of what it takes. me we obviously don't want to be renting for the rest of our lives and whatnot so um and like i said all of us have that you know generation of where we have passed on and passed on so some of us have to fend and look for what the case so like i said i'm interested in listening to the senators and query with them and to see where it is what angle they see fit yes and so good talking to you jamal and right now are we going to take you back to the africa africa africa are you ready okay all right all right like i said we go um right now we're looking forward to to interview the senators and and to see um like i said what they are so um i know it was a lot of information um i know a lot of this stuff will be hard for them to remember everything but just to just the basic stuff that we figured that we need to to get out there and watch that and then hear what they what they take and it is you know and i know you also have a

right because you have to write and you have to go through this as well you know so but like i said so far so far so good so far so good so far so good right now we'll take you over to africa are you ready okay i'm africa harrigan for legit tv currently governor albert bryan just delivered

3:13:05 the 2024 state of the territory address as you know the state of the territory address is mandated by the revised organic act of 1954. right now legit tv is transitioning from the state of the territory and we're transitioning into the senate reactions joining me is our senate president senator novell francis jr how are you i'm doing very well as part of the governor's speech he spoke about inflation the rising cost of interest rates and he also talked about you know the rising cost of goods and services as well the volatile global condition is a bit declining but yet the governor stated that the economic there's economic growth and the territory economic condition is pretty resilient what are your thoughts well what i gather from the governor again um of course he spoke about the um that we're resolute as a territory and i must say that while we're resolute I think that we're more resilient than anything else you know we continue to fight against the challenges that we're experiencing in respect to the economy and the inflation rates you know yes I would agree that we're not in a unique situation that in fact that you know we have inflation that does no trickling down into the versions and we have been able to continue to increase our revenues however that's being challenged again by the increasing costs you know why he spoke about some of the increases that we have seen one of those areas is certainly food yeah there is a significant increase in the food prices and again it's not unique just to the virgin islands i mean it's across the board across the nation as well um but you know the public's perception and um you know when we talk about the availability of liquid assets it presents some challenges for individuals you know he spoke and he used the the example that \$100 yesterday is now \$120 today. I think it might be even a little bit more that we're seeing, but nonetheless, you know, we have to fight against those challenges, and, you know, we as a government will have to find ways to perhaps subsidize and assist those individuals that continue to see the hardship. You know, we have, unfortunately, we no longer have all of the federal assistance that we have seen the um you know the pandemic funding um the snap programs on those areas you know so obviously people are starting to feel it in their pockets so that's a problem for us and those federal

3:15:38 programs was really significant it really helped out a lot of people here in the territory financially but let's move on to wapa wapa is in the process of completing their waterline rehabilitation projects on st froy as you know that that project consists of underground construction replacing corroding pipes and replacing them with pvc pipes as our senate president of the 35th legislature and as a resident on st croix how satisfied are you with the progress well wapa continue to be a challenge for all of us you know certainly we saw and of course we have the issue on the energy side as well as the water side um you know recently with the water crisis and you know the governor indicated that in fact uh the state of emergency and as it pertains to So the water will be over come tomorrow, but we still do have some situation and advisory should continue to exist where individuals should not be drinking the water. While you talk about it being rusty, brown, and corroded, that is a problem. I don't believe that individuals can consume that water. You know that I provided some funding and \$350,000 when we had the water crisis to be able to assist in providing bottled water to our community that was most affected. I'm hoping that we could find some additional revenues or additional funding to be able to continue to support that because it's unfair and unacceptable for individuals to consume that water.

3:17:07 And very quickly, I'm about to conclude this interview, but I can't help but steal something out of your playbook. What is it about the governor's speech that keeps you up at night? Well, I'll tell you that he touched briefly on the behavioral health issue and how we're improving that. I believe that we're all in this together, and we have to know that we have heard from the governor in regards to the state of the territory. what is very consistent and constant on my plate right now is the lack of vendors payment. You know, we have \$89 million on our streets. And of course, we know that if vendors are not being paid, then we can't collect taxes. You know, so we have a lot of our community members, our local vendors, that's really complaining of the fact that, you know, they have not been paid for the last several months. And like I say, \$89 million, we have to find a way to close that gap and be able to get our vendors paid up as soon as possible because that trickles back into money circulating within our economy. So what keeps me up at night right there was the economy and, of course, the fact that our vendors are not being paid as well as the retroactive paid that we committed to paying our retirees as well as our active workers. We want to make sure that we're seeing that payment going on to our government employees for the retroactivity.

3:18:25 Thank you so much for the interview. Alwyn? Thank you so much, Africa. This is Al Baptiste Jr. for Legit TV. I have to say to you, I'm here to not utter than the Vice President, Mr. Marvin Blyden. How are you doing? I'm blessed, Mr. Baptiste, on yourself. I'm good, I'm good, I'm good. So we just spent the last two hours listening to the governor's state of the territory. I know you're a vertebrate senator. You've been here a long time, so you've heard a lot of state of the territory. Yes, I have. So right now, the one thing that started out to me was the slice. Now, you know me, I mean, we had this conversation before about, you know, what we're doing with this federal money and how we're going to spend it and what we're going to do. So what are your thoughts about his approach or his statements? Well, honestly, Alvin, I was

honestly pretty disappointed.

- 3:19:24 I would have loved to have much more in respect, not only to slice, but home ownership opportunities for our people because that's what it's all about you know this he stated that we have assisted nine individuals in becoming homeowners whereas we know and i've been preaching from day one when it comes to home ownership opportunities and we have the tax credit properties loveland bellevue calabash boom that's over 300 individuals who can become homeowners instantaneously what i mean by that when they sign up for these units they was told they signed that they would have an opportunity to become a homeowner after 15 years after 15 years we must make these individuals whole that's our responsibility of the government and other people agreed home ownership is the most important investment anyone can make agree and we must we must make them whole now why i say that when it comes to home ownership and when it comes to these responsibilities we know that most young people like yourself will never never have an opportunity especially in saint thomas and john district to own a home right there is not much land in this district and the average cost right now to build a house in this district is between 600 and change and up as we know and a government salary wow so we have an opportunity to really really help our people it's about a quality of life we need to roll up our sleeves pull up our jack strap and get to work on behalf of our people agree we don't have a choice
- 3:21:17 when orbi and them back in the day did what they did for our people many of our elders and our parents in tutu and elsewhere and gave them opportunities they were better at the result of that right so why can't we do the same thing we must and i look forward to working with the disaster recovery and others to see how we can make this happen because I have had a discussion with her and I look forward to having a discussion with my colleagues to assure that we do our part. If that's the last thing we do, we must assist our people. One of the good things that he also mentioned was the Walter Hodge Pavilion. It was 200 something ruins with the ksp so that for sure was a blessing in the housing part definitely so we love to look forward for same and st thomas that definitely that's a that's an affordable housing inspector which is great also because everyone does not want to be a homeowner but at the same time they deserve to have affordable housing that's as nice as those with other amenities that is afforded to them and i was very happy for them but at the same time each of those units cost 700 plus per unit. So as the governor stated, construction is one of the biggest challenges we have in terms of cost and inflation. So it's important that we take advantage of these federal funds and utilize them in the best way possible on behalf of our people because that's who it's about and that's what it's about. And I look forward again to working with my colleagues and assuring that we do what is necessary to increase and improve the quality of life because that's what it's all about thank you
- 3:23:03 senator appreciate you sitting with me thank you so much appreciate right now you take you back to Africa thank you Alwyn joining me is our senator Carla Joseph how are you I am wonderful Africa how are you doing this evening pretty fantastic thank you for asking what are your thoughts on the governor's speech? I thought he was charismatically passionate in his presentation. He was very upbeat and optimistic in what his administration has done and working with the 35th legislature. So, but we have, as he indicated, and we already know this, you know, that we have a lot of work, more work to do serious work to do and get accomplished on behalf of the people of the Virgin Islands. In the governor's speech, he mentioned that \$1.5 million was allocated to the St. Croix Cricket Association. However, I mean to build facilities. 1.5 to the St. Thomas Cricket Association. Just a minor correction. No problem. And it's to build facilities in the state of Nazareth. However, the horse racing industry has very, very slow progression.
- 3:24:27 What are your thoughts on that? Well, the horse racing industry in the St. Thomas district is really up and running. It's going to be almost a year in March that the groundbreaking took place at the Clinton E. Phipps racetrack. And so the governor, in his state of the territory remarks, hit on a big major economic boost for our islands with the hope of having horse races for 2024 Carnival, St. Thomas Carnival. So definitely we should see some additional revenues coming in to help our coffers as well as to make whatever outstanding vendor payments that we have so i'm very happy about that you know i stood strong on supporting horse racing in fact we uh this past legislature the 34th we appropriated some monies to get additional equipment for the horse racing track here in the u.s virgin island st thomas clinton e phipps racetrack so i'm excited about that i'm a huge horse racing enthusiast and now let's talk about the cricket the cricket about the cricket the cricket which was named after one of my mentor the cricket field in a state nazareth which is named after my mentor george e goodwin uh cricket field we are hoping to see that because what we're looking at is a very key industry and that will be sport recreation so definitely we want to work on that just very quickly was there anything in governor's speech that you wanted him to talk about that he didn't mention tonight well as usual i
- 3:26:16 didn't hear nothing about agriculture i we just had the border agriculture uh rastafari food fair this past week i saw the lieutenant governor there nothing about agriculture and so i'm very concerned uh the legislature passed the agriculture plan we've supported it consistently The University of the Virgin Islands produced an agriculture plan, which we are working on, and they're working on, and we just had a whole opening of the agriculture business center at UVI and

nothing, nothing was said about that. We have to be serious about agriculture and being able to sustain ourselves with food. That's one of the things. But before we close out, because I look at your eyes and I know you're hinting, I really want to say that we have a lot of work to do, but it takes all of us to get the work done, working cohesively and to find that common ground. Because we all have the interests of the people of the Virgin Islands at heart. Thank you, Senator. And we know that you are a strong advocate for agriculture in the territory.

3:27:34 Almost every interview that I've done with you, you've always mentioned that. Back to you, Alwin. Thank you, Africa. I have here sitting with me, the Majority Leader, Mr. Kenneth L. Gittins. Long, long time in Pender Mines. How are you doing, Senator? I am blessed on yourself. I am good. I am good. Good. off, we're going to go a different route. Where did you think the Governor's statutory actually missed the dunk? Let's go that way, let's go the opposite way. What do you think that he didn't mention or he didn't talk about? Well, not that he actually missed the dunk. Let me just say that I think that the address overall was upbeat. However, it did lack what I was looking for with timelines. Timelines timelines of major projects in the territory and, you know, especially on St. Croix as well. And one of those areas is with the WAPA generators and the renewable energy system timelines and the actual implementation of these things. On St. Croix, you live on St. Croix as well.

3:28:47 I mean, there's so much detours on St. Croix with all the bridges closed. We know where to go. Exactly. i mean thank god we know shortcuts right but um there is no timeline on that either uh yes we're seeing a little uh progress but the thing is is after election everything stopped uh things started uh moving now coming on to the uh address and i'm thankful for that but again we lacked definite timelines for that and for the build of our hospitals and even the schools And you also mentioned, I was listening to some of your, you were fighting for the, for WAPA, honestly, for the records of what's going on with the accounting and what's not, what's not.

3:29:31 That's which is important because one thing should belong to the next. Very important. And as I've maintained from way back when, this government does not have a money problem. We have a money management problem. And it is across the board. Especially with all these billions coming in now to do... Exactly, and we could boast about \$1 billion and \$1 billion, but the thing is we have to be able to manage these funds.

3:29:58 I agree, I agree. And every tub must sit on its own battle. I know that probably you're right. So people need to be held accountable so that we can get things moving and do the best for all Virgin Islanders. The quality of life for Virgin Islanders should be at the forefront. I agree. We didn't have a mention also, we just came out of the St. Inquiry Festival, and we have a crime-free festival, so they didn't mention that as well. Those are good things, because we know we always hear the negative, especially when you get to a point where we start to gather. Yes. But we had an incident-free, nice for Goldwater case, and so to the police department as well.

3:30:38 Exactly, and since you went there, I want to also say that I was going to wait until my January 31st hearing to tip my hat to the Virgin Islands Police Department, but you brought it up and I want to say publicly thank you and I salute all of them for their hard work and keeping us safe through the festivities thank you senator amazing thing thank you for sitting with me thank you so much all right back to your Africa thank you Alwin joining me is senator Angel Bocas junior how are you today I'm doing good so in the governor's speech he mentioned that the depleted cash on the hand is causing significant delays to vendor payments recently was reported in the news that the government of the virgin islands owes 89 million dollars to vendors what recommendations do you have to mitigate that issue well i believe that what we're experiencing is um three problems we have a collections problem we have a procurement process which the governor was talking about trying to get the procurement process to be streamlined so that funds can easily flow through the economy, and we have a reconciliation problem in a sense of bank accounts and funds that have not been reconciled ever. And once we're able to fix those issues, then we'll start to see sort of the influx of the funds moving throughout the territory. Also, what we're also experiencing, in my opinion, is the levelization of federal funds that have been available to us for the past few years. Now we're starting to see the back-end effect of those federal funds being dwindling slowly, And, of course, we want to infuse the economy, as the governor stated, so that we can bring the economy back up.

3:32:20 What were your thoughts on the government's speech overall? Overall, I believe the state of the territory started out gloomy. You know, the governor mentioned a number of things or issues or concerns that have taken place and challenges that are before us. But he started to build up momentum on all the other things that have been accomplished. and other initiatives that he would like to implement in order to help the economy get back up to where we need it to be as well. In addition to the vendor payments and other challenges facing the territory, our fiscal challenges, was there anything in the governor's speech that you would have liked him to mention tonight?

- 3:32:59 I don't believe he mentioned St. John enough. Yes, we had the school, but St. John is facing a number of issues to include our clinic, roads, a number of issues with repairs to some damaged government facilities that were not mentioned. So I really wish he had, he needs to look at that. His administration needs to look at what we can do for St. John as well. He mentioned St. Thomas and St. Croix throughout his state of territory address, but only mentioned the school on St. John.
- 3:33:30 What specific issues on St. John were you looking forward to hearing him speak about tonight? Well, there's a number of issues. Like I just mentioned, we have the department, the fire department. We need to fix our building there. Human services needs repair. BMV is in a trailer. We need to fix that. Yes, we got the tennis court and the basketball court, but we need government agencies to operate at optimal levels on the island of St. John. Yes, e-government helps because people don't have to necessarily catch the boat in some cases, But we really need to take a hard look at the infrastructure of St. John. St. John is the jewel of the Virgin Islands in a sense of tourism. We generate more by GDP from tourism on that small little island, and we should actually try to make sure that we have optimal progress on that island.
- 3:34:22 Thank you, Senator Anahebel Boquez. You're definitely a strong advocate for St. John. Back to you, Alwyn. Thank you, Africa. I'm here sitting with the lovely Delegate of Conference, Ms. Stacy Plaskett. How are you doing this evening? I'm well. I'm well. Thank you so much for giving me some time to talk with you this evening. I appreciate it. Thank you. Thank you for taking the time. Yes. So, the State of the Territory. How much time have you gone through the State of the Territory? I've been through this a few times now. I'm realizing I'm getting to be one of the veterans here in the room. Oh, yes.
- 3:34:53 Yes. So, what do you think? What do you think about his approach to this State of the Territory compared to last year and past years? Sure. comparisons of it but I think that one of the things that our governor has that is very important is as he said in the state of the territory that we are resolute that he is very resolved about his plans and how he wants to move forward pushing through obstacles and attempting to get to an achievement that he is outlined whether that be through technology or that be related to reversing brain drain bringing young people in these are things that you've heard throughout the various years that he's given his state of the territory, and I think they speak to his vision and his plan. Okay.
- 3:35:38 And so especially from right now with disaster recovery, we have billions, billions, literally billions coming into here. So I know as a Virgin Islands, sometimes we don't see it moving as fast as we would like to see it. We know it is moving. Well, you know, that's the thing that, one of the things that gave me a sense of pride in my own work and the work of my office was the amount of revenues that came from federal funding, came from the work of our office, whether it was to change the law so that we could receive exponential money through the recovery. The funding that we received through ARPA was really a line item that I wrote when I was on the Ways and Means Committee for us to get a disproportionate amount of funding for the size of our territory, as well as some of the other funding whether that's FEMA or otherwise. I am concerned because as the governor stated there's over eight billion dollars which has been obligated thus far. Of that eight billion dollars that we have spent 3.1 billion. That leaves two-thirds that has not been spent thus far and of that 3.1 billion that's been spent over 2 billion of that was in emergency funding that was utilized directly after the storm and a large portion of that is administrative costs. So we've got to be able to begin to move this money not as obligated but to actually be utilized and then there's another 15 billion dollars that is out there that is going to be used whether it's for the schools or the hospitals all of the other projects changing our wastewater system etc. We have got to find a 1.5 billion dollar match to that money and that's something that I know that our legislature has got to really dig into the numbers. I was grateful for the hearing on Friday which really calls for accountability and I'm grateful to the governor for also saying that we need to have a long-term cash management strategy and I think that's something that's an all of government both the legislature and the executive branch working together to resolve. Thank you so much for sitting with me thank you thank you senator thank you senator oh my gosh that's an honorable job i'll stay in my lane though thank you very much all righty thanks
- 3:37:56 back to you africa thank you alwyn for that riveting interview joining me is senator diane capehart how are you tonight i am doing well and yourself i'm doing very well so recently the governor signed into law the bill pertaining to the real crime the real-time crime center tell us about that yes um i'm very excited about it because this is a tool for the virgin islands police department with modern technology there's so many things happening to help their the police officers of of the territory have better equipped information on cameras, the license plate readers, different tools that all come together in one. And the Real Time Crime Center was recently passed by the governor, so I'm very happy for the Virgin Islands Police Department having a tool of technology to help them fight crime. Was there anything in particular in the governor's speech that you wanted him to talk about tonight that he didn't mention at all?
- 3:39:11 Well, retro, for the people of the Virgin Islands, they received, some people received money, some didn't. Wanted him to talk about that also. I wanted to hear more about, he did mention about behavioral health, and I've been advocating for a

behavioral facility facility on both islands, just not one island, because after the natural disasters, COVID, we've had an increase of behavioral problems, and I want to see that we address homelessness. These are things that's happening. I'm happy to hear that he talked about the opioid, all the money that's coming to the territory.

3:39:54 And speaking of the opioid, the governor stated that that is a rising crisis in the territory. far we've had about approximately three deaths so i mean how do we mitigate those challenges well uh serious education and outreach that the community needs to be educated about what happens when you you take opioid and how it can just change your whole life your family's life so i'm happy to see that the territory is getting money but i want to be able to know that the money is spend within a reasonable time just like all the disaster recovery projects that some of my colleagues mentioned I would like to see timelines on that and money spent that's what keeps me up at night knowing from these hurricanes we have not spend the monies that we need to spend thank you so much senator for such a riveting interview you so passionate yes I am in your responses continue to work We have a little bit more time. How did you feel about the governor's speech overall? Well, I didn't fall asleep, that's for sure.

3:41:09 He kept us on our feet. As I said, I wanted to hear more timelines. Some of the things I'm like, oh, well, I already heard this, you know, I just heard some new things with the opioid. lot of things happening like within the the tourism industry i'm happy to see there's been an an increase of you know passengers coming to the territory i'm happy speaking of that let me just interject the tourism industry is booming especially the cruise ship industry in the eastern caribbean there's been a lot more airport passengers coming into the territory and um there's been a rise on airbnb and the hotel occupancy rates have been pretty stable what do you think is attracting visitors to the territory um definitely you know the virgin islands with our uniqueness of being the united states territory that's one of the attractions of course the summer all year round the the water the great hospitality the food they're different definitely things that attract people here to the virgin islands it's just that we need to also make sure that we work on customer service giving our our passengers our visitors the whole experience of hospitality for the virgin islands thank you senator diane capehart back to you alwyn thank you africa i am sitting here with the lovely the finance chair how are you doing this evening i am wonderful i am a little warm but i'm good a little warm yes i like warm i don't like i don't like the cool so i will be comfortable okay so let's talk about

3:42:56 the 2024 state of the territory um my only question for you we already had a meeting on friday so we went through this finances of where we're at are you comfortable with where the governor touched on finances well i'll tell you this um when we look back at the year 2023 and i say the year i mean fiscal year 2023 we know that we didn't close fiscal year 2023 the way that we had projected and of course that has caused some challenges with um our cash overall but as we look to 2024 um it is clear based on the current revenues the revenues for fy 2024 to date in the first quarter are showing um an uptick over the same time in fy 2023 however it is important that um you know the projects that the chief executive spoke about this evening that those projects come to fruition because as we worked on our 24 budget we considered the revenues from those projects. I was a little I was very I'm encouraged by the fact that we saw that there were a number of those there's an uptick in our building permits so it means that we should see an uptick in our income taxes and an uptick in our grocery seats. So that's encouraging we should see an uptick in our corporate taxes but we have to watch we have to watch our revenues and we have to watch our expenses it is important that as leaders in the territory we work together collectively to address these issues overall one of the things that was important to me is the disaster recovery projects we need to see that those disaster recovery projects really come to fruition. As we looked at FY 2023, those projects did not come to fruition as we thought they would, and hence some of the reason why we're experiencing what we're experiencing now as it relates to cash flow. Of course, we know we had the hearing on Friday, and there was a lot of revelations, and I will say that for me, it is important that we work collectively together. However, the Department of Finance and the Office of the Financial Team, there's just to the financial team of this territory, it is important that they show best effort, that they've done all in their power before we begin to deliberate on this matter. One of the things that's equally concerning to me is the fact that we have, based on the information they provided, some \$77 million in federal funds that remain undrawn, that has been spent. So that is contributing to our cash flow issues. So they have to show an earnest effort that they are in fact working on those things and they're making an earnest effort to ensure that they're shoring up our financial health in the territory. But we see that there's an uptake in the cruise ships coming to the territory. We hope to see some more employment coming into the Virgin Islands. So overall, I am encouraged, but seeing is believing. As you know, we've experienced, we've heard a lot of good things in the past, but I think what matters is, you know, when the elephants fight, the people get trampled.

3:46:31 So what matters here is that we really work with each other to really see and prove. We have to show and prove point at this point. So we want to see the fruits of our labor, and in order to see that it matters that we work together to get that done. Amazing. Thank you so much for sitting with me. Thank you, Senator Peck Gregory. Back to you, Africa. Thank you. Alwyn, joining me is Senator Milton Potter, Chairman for the Committee on... Disaster Recovery, Infrastructure, and Planning.

- 3:47:01 And as it relates to your committee that you currently chair, what did you think about the governor's speech? Well, I think the governor, as usual, the governor presents a very optimistic tone, which is what you have come to expect from the state of the territory addresses. I think one thing that really stood out to me as chairman of that committee was the governor's decision to move in a different direction with respect to the bundling of projects. He indicated that he would be soliciting the services of a handful of mega contractors who will play an instrumental role in accelerating the rebuild project. That is something that I'm willing to be open-minded about. But definitely I would want to delve in a little deeper as to how this would look, what steps in the process we would have to take, but the devil is always in the details. So one of the first meetings that this committee will have will be to bring in the key personnel in the disaster recovery space to drill down a little deeper so that the people of the Virgin islands can get a clearer understanding as to what is involved in this one of the things that the governor mentioned in his speech was the infrastructures of the roads throughout the territories currently improving there has been repairs to bridges and there's also been an expansion on cargo ports the term that he used was modernization what are your thoughts I like I like the idea of of the modernization of our key road and highway infrastructure and cargo ports. Ultimately, that assists us with economic development. I also think, though, that in addition to having these road repairs in some of those larger areas, it is also critical that we get into the neighborhoods, so that roads in Savan, roads in Tutu Valley, roads smith bay can also get uh equal attention with respect to federal and local dollars um you know devoted towards repairing these uh these roads i mean that is definitely significant because a lot of the roads improvement actually take place on the main roads absolutely when it comes down into the local communities you don't the progress is a lot more slower it is you're absolutely correct about that that's where we live was there anything in particular that the governor did not mention that you were looking forward to hearing in his speech tonight um i mean and you
- 3:49:39 can't say everything in a speech i would have liked to hear some more details with regards to education um learning loss i know he mentioned learning loss and strategies for assisting with bridging that gap but i think again the devil is in the details we had the storms in 2016 or 2017 followed by COVID. Our children were drastically and significantly impacted by instructional loss and we must develop some intentional initiatives to bridge that gap. I'm happy that more students are graduating and the governor mentioned that but I'm not convinced that we should celebrate necessarily that more students are graduating I need to make sure that our curriculum has the rigor so that when you graduate you're graduating with a substance so that you can be successfully matriculated to a university if you so desire thank you so much senator Milton Potter back to you Alwyn thank you thank you Africa thank you so much I'm here sitting with the minority leader, Senator Dwayne M. DeGraff. How are you doing this evening, Senator? I'm doing fine. Good evening. Happy New Year to everyone. How are you doing? I am doing good. I'm doing good. I'm doing good. First time I'm doing this, so I'm trying to get a little hang of it. Yes, yes, yes. You're doing a great job. I appreciate it. Appreciate it. So let's start off. Like I said, you're a veteran senator as well. So you've been down this road already, stayed to the territory. So let's start off. We didn't hear much mention about the seniors in different And I know every time that you advocate for the seniorism, so what were you looking for or what did you mention that ring a bell with you?
- 3:51:30 Yeah, for me, I'm basically upset that the seniors weren't mentioned because they're actually who have made the Virgin Islands what it has been to this point. And going forward, we're talking about bringing in a workforce to take on some of these jobs. When that workforce come in, what is going to happen to us here, the residents? that's why i'd like to know i've been asking that question from last year um the governor's speech tonight is always upbeat but to me you know it's a cut and paste i i could tell you see a lot of these things that i tell you from they were going to come so i i've heard it before this is six this is my eighth right so again it's um about the people when we talk about about the people we have to look at again our seniors i don't want to harp on it but but you know that for sure he has said some great things in terms of collaboration i do believe there's a should always be a collaboration between the senate and the executive branch judicial branch i agree i'm in full support of it but i don't buy cat and back you know it's one thing if we had sit down here and listen to the governor for the first time and didn't have that meeting with the finance committee with his finance committee on friday where they're saying we got six days of cash left right we got problems we ain't drawing down millions of federal dollars very alarming you know so so to hear that meeting i sat in a meeting 10 hours all day and then to come here and then hey you know the country running good yeah don't fool the people man i ain't into that but we can work together and make things happen yeah i think uh at this point i think um we need to change policies as well. I think we've been doing the same thing for too long. And so how do we fix that? How do we go about getting that conversation? So it's been in the books, been in for 30, 40 years, so...
- 3:53:21 You know, like I say, it's not an easy job. I'm not gonna say the governor or the administration has an easy job, but again, it's for us to work together. It's for us to take one thing at a time. You know, we always like everything that glitter, you know, you're gonna bring in a bunch of people who go, hey, there's the best in this in the United States. They don't know a building, you know, they don't know how we do things here. The culture, right. And I think we tend to, and this is a

prime opportunity now with the population going from 110 down to 89, so much people are going to influx the territory. That's scary. We have to address it.

3:53:56 Agreed. Thank you so much. It's always a pleasure to see you, man. Thank you, man. Thank you, bro. Thank you. Right now, so back to you, Africa. Thank you so much, Alwyn. Joining me is our Senator, Samuel Carrion. How are you tonight? Good, good, good. So what are your thoughts on a governor's speech as it pertains to energy, how he's improving energy in the territory. It's going from an antiquated situation where there's constant problems with WAPA to now he's trying to move into a new direction of energy sufficiency and efficiency where residents will have an opportunity to basically take part in having their own energy situation set up in their homes. What are your thoughts?

3:54:40 In regards to the energy portion of his speech this evening, I was very optimistic. I was happy to hear all the federal funding that is coming in to support us in that area, especially for low-income families and single families, because I think it's important. We need to find alternative energy and provide other opportunities for individuals to not only get into this workforce, because there's a great market industry when it comes to energy, but also to provide savings and relief to our community that for years been suffering because of the high cost of energy here in the territory. So that was good.

3:55:18 Also, one of the things I would like to ask you about is the economy. Currently as you know that there's a cash depletion due to, you know, that is actually resulted in a lack of vendor payments right now the government do own the vendor payments 89 million dollars in total what are your thoughts on that well that's one of the areas where I am very concerned as you know I'm a member of the Finance Committee for these two terms this term and it's last term and and we've been able to we heard Friday the finance team for the governor and the release concerning to see where we are and some of the things that have to happen is we need to manage better our funding one of the things I realized in that hearing is that we have approximately 71 million dollars of federal dollars that has not been dropped down so if you're coming before this body requesting a line of credit we need to first deal with things internally and manage properly and find where areas they could save before we enter into borrowing money so we need to manage properly what we have and I think that's one of the areas where we're open as as a body to work with Administration to assist in any way possible, but we need to get a handle of that. We have vendors, like we heard this evening, that have not been paid, and these are local vendors that always provide services to the government, and how can they sustain their companies? We have heard stories of small companies that have been closing down because of lack of payment from the government. So these are areas that we need to really get a grip on to improve the conditions of our economy in the territory. We can't say we're good financially and the economy is strong when we can't pay our vendors when we're having issues and we're not really managing properly our funds.

3:56:58 So let me interject, being that you're a St. Croix Senator, you're representing the St. Croix District, and the Governor did mention in his speech that the Waterline Rehabilitation Project in which they will be removing antiquated pipes that are rusty and causing discolored water on St. Croix, and we will be replacing them with PVC pipes, but what do you think about the progress as a St. Croix resident? Well we're seeing that some of the work has been done and there's still some of the areas that they're starting to work on. I think that Public Works and they need to plan better with WAPA, strategize what roads they're going to work on, you know, the one dig project because sometimes you see that it's excessive, like our Christians to town, you know, they've been digging excessively, so they need to really strategize better the process by which they're going to do these diggings. But we needed and I'm glad to hear that some of the work has been done and will continue to be done thank you so much um alvin thank you africa right now we have our first president senator ray franceca committee on health and hospital how are you doing sir hey alvin everything is going fine good to see you good to see you good to see you see the territory that's what we are here for you sat down listening to the governor for the last two hours what are what are your initial thoughts Well, I listened tentatively to the Governor's State of the Territory Address, all 32 pages of it, and there's some things that I can support, but I'm concerned, specifically about the issues with the steel workers and the retro pay, of course, you know, the vendors with their outstanding payments, the issue with the income tax returns, and, of course, WAPA.

3:58:52 Yes. So I would say that we have a lot of work to do to get to where we need to be. The \$12 billion that they mentioned in the FEMA damage survey monies, it's only less Less than 25% has actually been obligated and a contract has been awarded. The governor even admitted that at the pace that we're going, it's going to take 20 years for us to get all of those projects finished. So that is not acceptable.

3:59:32 So what about health and hospitals and human services? What are your thoughts on those? Yes, you know, let's take the kidney dialysis. You know, in our community, we have 219 patients that right now are on kidney dialysis. And since I've been in the legislature, you know, whole 13 months, I have been advocating for the Virgin Islands government to acquire Caribbean Kidney Center Because, you know, the Wang Lui Hospital treats less kidney patients than Caribbean Kidney Center. There's a private group that treats more kidney dialysis patients on St. Croix than the government does. And also

on St. Thomas. We need to be able to provide the best care possible. The other thing that really concerns me is that there is too long a wait for us to get certain things like colonoscopies, endoscopies. People are dying in the community on a waiting list. Additionally, with the insurance, the copay is just too much. You have to come up with \$500. You can go to, you know, Mayo Clinic and get treated and the copay is much less. In the States, as a matter of fact, of the \$184 million we spend on health insurance, most of it goes off-island. So there's a lot of progress that we still need to get to that point where we're doing acceptable. But as a Democrat, you know, I support the governor's initiatives. but we have to pick up the pace. We've got a lot of work to do.

4:01:21 We've got a lot of work. Yes. Thank you so much, Senator Fasino. Blessing. Blessing. Thank you so much. Yes. Blessing. Back to you, Africa. Thank you, Alwin. Joining me is Senator Alma Francis Heiliger. How are you tonight? I am wonderful. Thank you. The governor touched on many topics throughout his speech. He spoke about our economy, the Department of Education. He touched on WAPA. He touched on infrastructure. What were your thoughts overall on his speech? Well, to be honest, I felt I was dealing with a deja vu situation because quite a bit of what he had in his speech I've heard before in regards to just looking at headlines and reading in depth. So it literally felt like newspaper articles were woven together to create a speech.

4:02:06 But I did attentively listen. Was there anything in particular that you were looking forward to hearing him speak about tonight that he did not mention in the State of the Territory Address? Well, one of the major things for me he didn't really touch on had to do with our children in this territory. We recently had a report come out, Kids Count, that really spoke about the fact that 33% of our children in the territory are living in poverty. And the fact that this somehow went over the governor's head was very disappointing to me. Because the way you treat your children is direct correlation as to the type of future you're going to have and I was very I felt he was a little bit disconnected from that aspect of it but we'll see what happens speaking of the children of our territory he did mention that the Department of Education is making significant strides towards improving the public education system he mentioned that the dropout rates has decreased and the graduation rates has increased. Share your thoughts. Well one, I do agree that these numbers are the numbers he shared, but when you have a 74.4 percent graduation rate, but what he didn't also mention is the average national rate is 86 percent, and we are still well below the graduation rate. So when we want to celebrate our children graduating, which we should we should also be making sure that they're getting educated in a way that they're learning and comprehending and somehow reach to a level that we surpass the national average of 86 and not be cheering on that our children are still below average well you seem to be really passionate about this subject so how do we mitigate this issue what recommendations do you

4:04:02 have well well for me when it comes to the education of our children we have to look at it holistically the Department of Education we spend quite a bit of funds to make sure that department runs but let's be real the majority of the funding goes to the hierarchy if you calculate the amount of monies that are being spent on our children locally versus national or even to comparing them to private schools our children per dollar amount we spend more on public school children than we do in some of our private schools but when you look at the level of education there's a major disconnect when you have the majority of the funding going to administration but you still have me as a senator taking phone calls from teachers asking for assistance for supplies or can we copy this or copy that i'm looking at this entire department as we need to revamp it completely in order to make sure that more dollars are going to our children to guarantee the level of education they need and they deserve so we could provide for a better future for our territory with educated children that will propel the virgin islands forward thank you senator for for this interview, Alwyn.

4:05:22 Thank you, Africa. Right now I'm sitting on with the Freddie State man, Senator from Freddie State, Mr. Senator Franklin Johnson. Good evening, Alwyn, I'm fine. How are you doing? How are you doing? I'm great. I'm watching the leg on the bottom. I ain't gonna talk about it. Don't worry about that. That's good to go. Okay. So let's talk about the state of the territory. You know, Alwyn, you're a musician. And you can't be playing reggae and the rest of the band playing people. And what the governor come down here tonight and spoke about, completely different from what his financial team came and said to us. So there's some kind of music sheet that is wrong someplace. They talk about the problem with collecting and revenues and he's saying it's up. So somebody down the wrong page, that's for sure. You know, he speaks very upbeat, but seeing is believing. He spoke about correction. I could tell you this This week I have to go and deal with a prisoner to prepare him for being out here on the street. Just walked out on the street. We just sent 22 to 28 prisoners away. We're investing in other communities when we send our prisoners to the mainland. When I worked in the Bureau of Correction, the guys that we sent away were guys with problems.

4:06:32 And when we send them, we send them to a place where they can learn and get a trade. That isn't happening. He left out the Envision program. Our elders, our seniors, people are in these homes from Hurricane 2007, 2017. And he spoke nothing about that. That seems to be of no interest. But for me, when I walk in the street and I see my elders and the

seniors and people homes that I walk into and see the water dripping in their house, that bothers me. We have to do better for our people, but yet he wants to send down legislation to come and take your property.

4:07:08 How do we do this? That's what I was going to ask you. We have been talking about the properties in the towns, what are we going to do with these properties? So that was one of the things that stuck up with me as well. And if my memory is right, there was some 25 million sent down from the interior department for grants. I have a friend that's been applying and there on waiting list for this grant for over five years. There's some \$15 million left for these homes in these towns. Tell me something about that. Tell me that you have utilized that \$15 million. spoke about people not paying the tax that program whether you're up to date with your tax or not they're coming for your property i definitely would like to see our towns get rebuilt but i'm not just about taking people property for 30 years how old are you alwin 50. you're 50 suppose 26 i'm so sorry go ahead if you if you're 40 years old and they take your property for 30 years you're gonna be what 70 when you could get back your property let's be real about this and let's find ways. If the Interior Department gave us \$25 million, we could go back and get more money and do grants. We're a historic district, and they always put funding in historic districts.

4:08:20 What about this water, the brown water? He spoke like he was only concerned with the lead and copper. But I live on the Western end, and I see what these people have to deal with. I really honestly believe that they should have started working on the pipes from the west come up because the west is the end of the water run. All of the water from Wapa starts from east come down. So the dredge and everything flows down there. So if you're starting the worst area working, going up, by now the people in Fredericksburg had some cleaner water. He didn't speak about Polly Joseph. He didn't speak about Lionel Jacob, Lionel Roberts Stadium. And these are the parks that will bring revenue to us if we are seriously talking about sports tourism these parks will bring that money back to us spoke about he gave uh the idea uh those guys in st croix five million dollars that's not true five million dollars is sitting there those guys have not received that money you know so he speaks upbeat but we got to get real with it and we got to be real to our people there's a lot of work i'm here to walk whether you're a democrat republican or independent it's about getting the work done for the people and i'm not going to just sit here and go along to get along that i've never been that guy and ain't gonna be that guy today okay it's about getting the work done for the people and make sure that we bring better conditions deal with our folks nothing about seniors right we got about three four seniors home closed down what What are we doing? If we are not taking care of our seniors and our youths, we are in problem. He didn't speak about the learn loss.

4:10:01 He spoke very vague about that. What are we going to do to fix that? And it's a serious problem. Yes, yes it is. When you see children coming out of school and they can barely read, they can barely do the math, it's a serious problem. A lot of serious problems that we have to be going through. Senator Franklin Johnson, I am so grateful for you. I know you're passionate and you're developing. What I want you to do for me is give him the music. treat so you could know everybody got behind the same page thank you very much thank you senator thank you senator back to africa you did such an excellent job with that interview that it was just so passionate you could just hear the passion in the senator's reactions from the governor's speech for the state of the conservatory address uh this one was kind of a issue for me um my first go on about it um i actually prepared by looking at the speech from last year and so i went through the different aspect from last year to this year to see what was strength or what was stronger was weaker i was not so it was an interesting bunch of transition i think last year we dealt more with covet and stuff like that this year with more about finances and what we're doing it was definitely about finances i mean 21 pages into the governor's speech he basically spoke about finances from the cash at hand from the depletion from the vendor's payment he stressed really heavily on the finances this year even some of the monies that some of the organizations the water rehabilitation project on st croix and you live on st croix so i'm sure you probably experienced of the discoloration of the brown water crisis at least once a week so at least once a week so sorry about that i don't know what i said this is the thing that we're actually going through so this is the stuff we want to hear this is what we want to discuss um and this atmosphere it seems like it's no we're trying to talk about the good stuff with the ksb and just kind of dwell on it on the the bad stuff but we we live in it so we need to we as our people are need to make some noise about it as well can we actually go into it absolutely on a bigger level so what do you think jamal i

4:12:00 think i have similar thoughts about it because you know looking through this speech it was heavy it was very heavy on finances we we're seeing you know we're seeing that transition from last say you know hey we have the money this is what we're going to do with it but yes we have the money this is what we're going to do with it but i do think it was there could have been some we could have focused a little bit more on you know some of the heavier things you know education is has been a big topic and speaking of speaking of education i would have liked for him to go deeper into the strategic plan that they're using to improve the public education system here in the territory i mean yes we have seen improvements however what can we do to get it better how can we make it better right and it seems like it seems like it just moves slow especially for us we we live through it so we have to we see all the press releases you write the press

releases so we yes we do have a very good you know i think but i think it needs to be more open-minded and more out for the public so we can have more discussions so the public will be around to discuss the It's something that we're going through. It really affects them as well, you know.

4:13:11 What did you guys think about the portion where he spoke about the energy? How, you know, we're moving into a more modernization of not only energy, but infrastructure, improving the roads, and improving the bridges, and the port expansions. What did you guys think about that? We're still dealing with WAPA. WAPA is one of the most important things. We have, I mean, healthcare and everything else, but WAPA is like an everyday thing. You know, if you can't have power. We can't have good running water, what it can be. That's almost like to the top of it. So that's what I think about a lot and who's affected. Like I said, I might be affected once a week, but there are people in FedEx said they're affected every single day.

4:13:51 They can't wash the clothes and they don't know what it can be. So I think that's at the forefront for me. Right? That's it. That's an excellent response. What about you, Jamal? I agree. I definitely think WAPA is one of the most important things that it affects everybody from, you know, you are a single parent maybe you're trying to figure okay how am i going to pay this wapa bill um no i i i live with my parents i live with my parents my my bill is you know can go up to like two three hundred dollars and that's just three adults in one house so and you know he didn't mention the time when when the issue with the water bill and the wapa bill had increased and they still haven't removed that off your bill.

4:14:34 Overall, I'm optimistic. I am looking forward to see how the senators react in the next couple of months. But overall, I think it's informative. I learned some stuff, some stuff we need to work on, and I think we should be good. Yes, I agree. Thank you so much for tuning in. I'm Africa Harrigan. I'm Al Baptiste Jr. I'm Jamal Potter. And we're representing for Legit TV. Legit TV. Thank you. Thank you.

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.

- 7x **Senator Dwayne DeGraff**
heard in this transcript as: DeGraff, Duane DeGraff, Duane M. DeGraff, Dwayne M. DeGraff
- 7x **Senator Marise C. James**
the surname alone also matches: Javan James; Giovanni James Sr
heard in this transcript as: James, Maurice C. James
- 6x **Senator Alma Francis-Heyliger**
heard in this transcript as: Alma Francis Heiliger, Francis Heiliger
- 6x **Senator Kenneth L. Gittens**
heard in this transcript as: Gittins, Kenneth L. Gittins
- 6x **Senator Samuel Carrion**
heard in this transcript as: Carrion
- 5x **Senator Angel L. Bolques, Jr.**
heard in this transcript as: Angel Boquez Jr, Angel L. Bolques Jr., Angel L. Bolquez Jr., Bolquez, Boquez
- 5x **Senator Diane T. Capeheart**
heard in this transcript as: Capehart, Diane Capehart, Diane T. Capehart
- 5x **Senator Marvin Blyden**
heard in this transcript as: Blyden, Marvin A. Blyden
- 5x **Senator Novelle Francis**
heard in this transcript as: Francis, Novel E. Francis Jr
- 5x **Senator Ray Fonseca**
heard in this transcript as: Fonseca
- 4x **Senator Franklin D. Johnson**
heard in this transcript as: Franklin Johnson
- 3x **Senator Carla Joseph**

- 3x **Senator Donna A. Frett-Gregory**
heard in this transcript as: Donna Fred Gregory
- 3x **Senator Fred Gregory**
the surname alone also matches: Donna A. Frett-Gregory; Donna Frett-Gregory
- 3x **Senator Javan James**
heard in this transcript as: Javon E. James
- 3x **Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach**
heard in this transcript as: Tregenzeri Roach
- 2x **Governor Juan F. Louis Hospital**
- 2x **Senator Milton E. Potter**
heard in this transcript as: Milton Potter
- 2x **Senator Peck Gregory**
the surname alone also matches: Donna A. Frett-Gregory; Donna Frett-Gregory
- 2x **Justice Reese Hodge**
- 2x **Judge Robert Molloy**
- 2x **Senator Samuel Carillon**
- 1x **Senator Donna Frett-Gregory**
heard in this transcript as: Donna A. Frett-Gregory

Bills and acts referred to

Matched by number against our own acts corpus. The number is what the recognition heard, so it may be wrong; where it resolved, the title is the one the Legislature gave the act.

- Act 8701** · An Act authorizing the Governor to utilize monies from public funds of the Virgin Islands to create working capital, to engage in a line of credit in the maximum amount of \$100,000,000 to provide for the disbursement of funds needed to advance disaster-related recovery projects that are reimbursable through federal flinding and other disaster-related projects and provide funding to advance payment of the \$45,000,000 towards the buyout of the infrastructure agreement between the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority and VITOL and the acquisition of the LPG facilities and to issue the Series 2023 Notes ---0