



State of the Territory Address | January 25, 2021

Legislature USVI

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

0:01:00 Thank you. Thank you. ¶¶ Oh, yeah, man.

0:02:59 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. This session is hereby reconvened, mic please, my mic is on.

0:05:25 Good evening all. Pursuant to the revised Organic Act of 1954, subsection 9C, the Legislature is hereby called to order to receive the State of the Territory Address from the ninth elected Governor of the United States Virgin Islands, the Honorable Albert Bryan, Jr. Please stand for the invocation by Bishop Damas Alloy.

0:06:14 Hello, good day, good day everyone in the precious, lovely name of Jesus Christ, Lord and soon-coming King. My name is Pastor D.S. Loy. I am the Senior Pastor of the Living Word Family Ministries Church, and I'm delighted to perform the invocation for the State of Territory Address today. Thank you so very much for inviting us, and let us pray. Heavenly Father, We come to you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ We humble ourselves before you today Because the Bible declares when we humble ourselves You will lift us up Today in the name of Jesus, your only begotten Son I pray that you will bless the event today I pray God that your mighty hands and your anointing will be fresh upon our governor i pray god that you will give him all the wisdom that he need and the graces for god to speak to the territory from his heart and we pray that oh god the territory will be benefited and the territory will be edified by the state of the territory address. Oh God, you said in your words that when we pray, when we call on your name, you will not cast us off. So we come with confidence that your will will be done in the state of the territory as our governor would speak to us today. God's will be done, God's way be done in our lives and in our territory give our leaders wisdom wisdom above their age wisdom above their stories wisdom oh god to govern the territory bless the president of the 34th legislature donald fred gregory and all the senators that the purpose of god of the community be established in every life and in every home. Bless, we pray, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and we thank you for listening. Amen and amen.

- 0:08:39 Thank you, Bishop Eloy. Please be seated. Madam Secretary, can I have a quorum call, please? Senator Marvin A. Blyden? Present. Senator Marvin A. Blyden, present.
- 0:09:07 Senator Samuel Carrion? Present. Senator Samuel Carrion, present. Senator Dwayne M. DeGraff? Here. Senator Dwayne M. DeGraff, present. Senator Novell E. Francis Jr. I'm here. Senator Novell E. Francis Jr., present. Senator Alma Francis Heiliger. Present. Senator Alma Francis Heiliger, present. Senator Donna A. Fred Gregory, here. Senator Donna A. Fred Gregory, present. Senator Kenneth L. Gittins. Senator Kenneth L. Gittins, absent. Senator Javon E. James Sr. Senator Javon E. James, Sr., present.
- 0:09:51 Senator Franklin D. Johnson? Senator Franklin D. Johnson? Senator Carla Joseph? Senator Carla Joseph, present. Senator Steven D. Payne, Sr. Senator Steven D. Payne, Sr., present. Senator Milton Potter? Senator Milton Potter, present. Senator Janelle K. Saru? Senator Janelle K. Saru, present. Senator Kurt A. VLA. Senator Kurt VLA, absent. Senator Genevieve Whitaker, present. So we have a total of 13 present and two absent. We have a quorum call, Madam Chair.
- 0:10:35 Please mark Senator VLA as present. Madam Chairwoman, we have 14 present, one absent. Quorum established. Thank you, Madam Secretary. We have established a quorum. Please note that this session is a reconvened session. So there's no need for the ANTEM and other protocols that has already been established. Madam Clerk, do we have any correspondence? Yes, Madam President.
- 0:11:13 You may proceed. Letter dated January 21st, 2021. The Honorable Senate President Donna Fred Gregory, Legislature of the Virgin Islands. Dear Senate President Fred Gregory, first may I take this opportunity to congratulate you on being elected as President of the 34th Legislature of the Virgin Islands. I look forward to working collaboratively and successfully with you and the other Senators in doing the people's business. Second, I wish to confirm that I am prepared to perform the State of the Territory on January 25, 2021 at 7 o'clock p.m. There are so many things to share with you and the public about the progress that was made over the past year, and I look forward to delivering that address. I intend to update Senators on the current State of the Territory and share projections for new projects and policy implementation as mandated by law. Thank you for your usual courtesies in enabling this event.
- 0:12:13 Respectfully yours, Albert Bryan Jr., Governor. Thank you. Do we have... Sorry. You may proceed. Letter dated January 23, 2021, Honorable Donna Frank Gregory, Senate President, Legislature of the Virgin Islands. Dear Senate President Frank Gregory, I write to communicate that I have received your invitation to be present at the Honorable Governor Albert Bryan Jr.'s address to the 34th Legislature of the Virgin Islands on the State of the Territory, scheduled for the evening of Monday, January 25th, 2021. Unfortunately, I will not be able to attend the address at the Legislative Chambers in Charlotte and Marley, St. Thomas. As you are aware, I have been appointed as an impeachment manager to the trial of President Donald J. Trump before the United States Senate. On the same day of our State of the Territory Address, I, along with the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, the Honorable Nancy Pelosi, and the other impeachment managers will have the solemn and sad task to transmit the Article of Impeachment of Donald J. Trump to the United States Senate Chamber. I look forward to reviewing the Governor's Address at the earliest convenience and trust that it will not only be thoughtful and transparent as to the state of our territory, but also provide clarity on the work and priorities of his administration for the next year. I remain committed in service to the people of the Virgin Islands.
- 0:13:46 I pledge to continue to work with both Governor Albert Bryan Jr. and the 34th Legislature of the Virgin Islands as we all strive to ensure a better and resilient Virgin Islands for our present time and for future generations to come. I ask that you pray for me, my staff, and my family as I proceed with dedication to our democracy and loyalty to my oath, as I do my part to ensure that no one is above the law. Sincerely, Stacey E. Plaskett, Member of Congress. This concludes the reading of all correspondence, Madam President. Thank you, Madam Clerk. And we all know that the delegate is here in spirit, and I'm certain that she's viewing from afar. We've also heard the requests of the governor, hence the reason why we are here this evening.
- 0:14:36 Ladies and gentlemen, we will now receive the guests of the governor. Please stand as we welcome our twelfth elected Lieutenant Governor of the United States Virgin Islands, the Honorable Tregenza A. Roach, accompanied by Senator Genevieve Whittaker, Secretary of the 34th Legislature. Thank you. Thank you.
- 0:16:23 While we wait, one quick house keep and measure. Can you please put all your cell phones on vibrate or turn them off, please? Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
- 0:17:53 Thank you. President. Give me one more, one more time. We have to do this for the photo. Yes, thank you. Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach.
- 0:18:53 Please be seated. We will now await the Sergeant-at-Arms announcement. Thank you.

- 0:19:53 Madam Clerk, please also recognize Mark Senator Kenneth L. Gittins as present. Madam President, the honorable governor of United States Virgin Islands, Albert Bryan Jr.
- 0:20:53 Thank you. Thank you.
- 0:21:53 You may be seated. Bishop D.S. Eloy, Lieutenant Governor Tregenzo, A. Roach, Esquire, Senate President Donna Fred Gregory, and members of the 34th Legislature, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands, the Honorable Reese S. Hodge, and the Honorable Justices of the Supreme Court, Presiding Judge Harold W. L. Willocks, and the Honorable Judges of the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands. Cabinet members, invited guests, and my fellow Virgin Islanders, good evening. Just by looking at the audience present, you can tell that this year is far from normal. I extend greetings to my wife, First Lady Yolanda Bryan, the Delegate to Congress, Stacey E. basket, members of the judiciary, members of my cabinet and staff, and other dignitaries who are viewing us remotely this evening. Congratulations to the Senators of the 34th Legislature on your election and in most instances your re-elections to serve the people of the Virgin Islands.
- 0:23:38 For those of you who are newly elected, I encourage you to hit the ground running. Your veteran colleagues will assure you that two years will pass by rather quickly. Meaningful and impactful legislation requires time, thought, and collaboration. The Brian Roach Administration is ready to work with you toward this end. On behalf of the Virgin Islands people, I have extended congratulations to the new President of the United States, Joseph R. Biden. I consider him our hometown president, and we look forward to the U.S. Virgin Islands being his port of solace for the next eight years. We have much work to do, lots of work to do with the federal government, and his familiarity with our people and our issues bodes well for advancing our causes in Washington, D.C. We also congratulate Vice President Kamala Harris on her election as the first woman and person of color to hold that post in our nation's history. We look forward to the fast approaching future when a woman or a person of color occupying the highest leadership positions in our country is no longer viewed with such novelty.
- 0:25:03 Our delegate to Congress, Stacy Plaskett and I, have never allowed the fact that we were not of the party in power to prevent us from aggressively pursuing the agenda of the Virgin Islands in Washington. However, the fact that we are affiliated with the National Democratic Party and now have a Democratic majority in Congress and a Democratic administration in the White House is certainly advantageous to us. We wish the Delegate well in her new role on the powerful House Ways and Means Committee and welcome our continued collaboration. Last year, we found ourselves depending on the men and the women of the Virgin Islands National Guard in a new role, protecting us from an invisible enemy.
- 0:25:52 The COVID-19 pandemic is an unparalleled threat to our people, and the Guard was on the front lines from the very beginning, whether it was patrolling the beaches, conducting screenings at the airports, or transporting COVID-positive patients, and now the vaccines, the Guard was there. On behalf of the people of the Virgin Islands, I offer continued gratitude to the members of the Virgin Islands Army and Air National Guard for their commitment to service. Please pray for their safety, and for the safety of all Virgin Islanders serving on active duty in our armed forces. I also extend my gratitude to the dedicated and selfless Virgin Islanders who have served at the forefront of this pandemic. The staff at our hospitals, public and private medical centers, the Department of Health, our law enforcement officers, the administrative teams at the Department of Labor, VITEMA, Human Services, Education, Finance, Tourism, Licensing and Consumer Affairs, LEPC, Internal Revenue Bureau, the Office of the Lieutenant Governor, and the Office of the Disaster Recovery. All of the people who we never see but have done more than their fair share to safeguard this community.
- 0:27:28 This evening, I express sincere appreciation for the part you have played in managing this unprecedented crisis. Tonight, I am pleased to appear before you for the third time as Governor of the Virgin Islands of the United States to report on the state of the territory in accordance with the revised Organic Act of 1954. Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach and I want you to know that we are bringing progress to our people. Last year saw the introduction of a deadly virus into the human population, The likes of which had not been seen in nearly a century. The virus quickly spread throughout every corner of the globe, impacting human civilization in unimaginable ways. Our local Department of Health immediately recognized the emerging threat and began its effort to combat the spread of the COVID-19 by activating the Emergency Operations Center on January 27th in conjunction with VITEMA. A few days later, the World Health Organization declared a public health emergency of international concern. On March 13th, we received confirmation of the first case of COVID-19 in the territory. I officially declared a state of emergency in the U.S. Virgin Islands that very same day. It is important to remember where we were at that precise time.
- 0:29:09 The United States had reported 2,204 cases of COVID-19 infections and a total of 49 deaths. In less than a year, the United States has documented over 25 million cases of COVID-19 and recorded more than 400,000 deaths. Since the first case arrived in our territory, there have been considerable moments of uncertainty, worry, and outright panic. We were

amidst a national shortage of personal protective equipment with insufficient surgical or N95 masks. We did not have sufficient life-saving ventilators or therapeutics to treat patients. We were concerned about the number of intensive care beds at our hospitals. We had a minimal number of viral test kits that forced us to be selected in who was eligible to be tested. While we are quite experienced in hurricane preparedness, our preparation for the global pandemic was far less than ideal. The federal authorities, they seemed to be in a sad state of disarray with the virus ravaging the state of new york we realized no one was coming to help us we would have to manage this one on our own at the time we declared the state of emergency our knowledge of the virus and how it was spread was very limited the list of stem symptoms we were screening patients for continued to grow. It was weeks before we learned that most carriers of the virus could spread the virus even though they exhibited no symptoms at all. We now refer to it as asymptomatic spread. Truth be told, our knowledge of this virus is still evolving this very day. On March 23rd, recognizing the escalating danger, I issued a stay-at-home order. At the time we announced the order, I was only the fifth governor in the entire nation to make such a declaration. It was an unprecedented decision to curtail business activity in the territory to slow the spread of the virus.

0:31:39 The decision needed to be swift and bold, and it required leadership. In truth, it was not an easy decision to make. But it proved to be the right one. Within weeks, every other state and territory within the United States had arrived at the same conclusion and issued similar stay-at-home orders, effectively shutting down the national economy. But that decision was costly. While we had considered the COVID-19 pandemic a public health crisis, we quickly realized that the response to that crisis have the potential to create great economic calamity. In February 2020, just prior to the emergence of the pandemic, there were 672 unemployment insurance claimants. 672. At the peak of the pandemic, that number had risen to 10,669. The loss of cruise ships and airline traffic was felt by our taxi and our tour operators. the merchants on Main Street, in Frederickstead, in Christianstead, Vendors Plaza, Havensite, and Crown Bay. It also financially impacted WICO and the Port Authority. Within a mere few months into 2020, our entire life had changed. Indeed, life had changed for the nation as well as the world.

0:33:09 We Virgin Islanders are a tough people. And our spirits are hard to break. We are at our best as a community when facing hardship and adversity. The good Lord knows we've had more than our fair share of adversity. So notwithstanding the COVID-19 global pandemic and the other hurdles of 2020, it should be no surprise to you that the state of our territory is resurgent. Our response to COVID-19 was deliberate, strategic and purposeful. We focused our attention on four critical parameters, monitoring and taking efforts to reduce community spread of the virus, maintaining the capacity of our health care system to address the hospitalization of COVID-positive patients, patients, administering sufficient testing and effective contact tracing. The COVID-19 crisis struck at a time when our hospitals were still in a compromised state from the storms of 2017. To ensure that we keep adequate capacity in our health facilities, our COVID task force has kept a daily inventory of the number of available intensive care beds, COVID-positive patients requiring hospitalization and the number of ventilators that we have in use at any time. We learned from the challenges imposed on us during the early attempts to airlift patients to other hospitals that we needed to be self-sufficient. Puerto Rico made it clear that they would not take any of our patients nor any others from the Caribbean. At the Roy Lester Schneider Hospital, we renovated an entire wing to care for COVID patients. On St. Croix, the National Guard collaborated with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the temporary conversion of

0:35:13 the Regional Training Institute to support the territory's coronavirus surge. This facility was one of the dozens that Army Corps and FEMA retrofitted across the country to accept COVID-19 patients when the hospitals reached their full bed capacity as we watched as we watched the hospitals on the mainland become overcrowded with patients in the hall and trailers being pulled alongside and converted to makeshift morgues we prepared thankfully we never got to that point not even close in the Virgin Islands.

0:36:00 We followed the science and decided that the most effective way to limit the rapid spread of the virus was by implementing a mandatory masking requirement. We were right. While other states and local governments were indecisive on the issue, people died and their hospitals continued to fill with COVID patients. Eventually, most governors in the country concluded that masking was essential in their response to the public health crisis. I am proud to say that we were among the first to implement a no-mask, no-service campaign. Now, the President of the United States is calling for a national campaign to promote mask wearing to stop the spread. A long-awaited, simple response to a very complex problem. Our testing capacity has increased immensely since the early weeks of the pandemic.

0:37:03 We can now conduct all currently FDA-approved tests and have multiple community health partners that conduct COVID tests along with us. We want to take a little minute to thank them tonight for their contribution to this community-wide effort. To date, we have administered over 60,000 COVID tests to 40,000 individuals, some of them taking the tests multiple times. There was a point last year when we became concerned that the Lime Tree Bay Refinery Terminal was a source of an increasing number of infections. As the largest private employee in the Virgin Islands, we

understood that shutting down the facility would adversely affect hundreds of families in the Virgin Islands.

- 0:37:55 These households were either fully or partially sustained from people working there. The management at Lime Tree Bay was very cooperative in helping us install the protocols. In addition to temperature screening, masking, and social distancing requirements, the refinery placed a moratorium on the import of all outside workers and began testing each and every one of its contractors and its employees every single two weeks. We appreciate the measures instituted by Lime Tree that successfully kept their employees safe and protected the wider St. Croix community.
- 0:38:38 Together, we overcame our first real surge without shutting down the economy every single day since the state of the emergency was declared. The law enforcement arm of our COVID-19 task force has been out enforcing the public health orders. Their work has at times been tiresome and frustrating, but it remains essential to safeguarding the public from the insensitive behavior of some of the folks that endanger us all. The effort of our law enforcement has not gone unnoticed, and we as a community are eternally grateful to them. We realized early on that closing our airports was not a viable option for a variety of reasons. Mostly understanding that many of us have health needs and we need to get out for critical care, as well as we need help to be able to come to us and get in. We ultimately focused our attention on making our ports of entry safe. We deployed our National Guard to conduct airport screenings. Those screenings became more and more sophisticated over the course of the response. We augmented the handheld thermometers with full body temperature scans. We began requiring a negative COVID result within five days of travel. We then deployed technology to build a travel portal for travelers to upload negative test results and receive preclearance prior to getting on the plane. Most recently, we leveraged our relationships with our airline partners to require proof of COVID testing prior to even boarding a flight from the United States mainland into the Virgin Islands.
- 0:40:34 We not only want you to feel safe, but we want you to be safe. We are now in the midst of our vaccine distribution efforts. by team our department of health have been aggressive in ensuring that we were actively engaged in operation warp speed to the amazement of many virgin islanders we received access to the coronavirus vaccine on the same schedule as the rest of the nation we are assured by our federal partners that they will supply the quantity of vaccines that we require it is our sincere hope that the majority of Virgin Islanders will choose to get inoculated against the virus, thereby doing their part to bring about the global herd immunity that will ultimately rid the world of COVID-19. From the onset of this crisis, we have strived to balance the three-legged stool of COVID management, protecting the public health, sustaining our economy, and respecting your individual freedoms.
- 0:41:50 But of these considerations, protecting the public health has remained our hand. I thank enough those Virgin Islanders who understood the gravity of this pandemic and did their part to protect themselves, their families, and their neighbors. Without your support, we could not and we would not have been as successful. We mourn the loss of each of the 24 Virgin Islanders who suffered untimely deaths as a result of the coronavirus.
- 0:42:30 However, we know it could have been much worse. The original projections predicted 200 people, 200 Virgin Islanders dead by June. Our COVID-19 mortality rate is nowhere near the current mortality rate on the U.S. mainland. While some may debate our decisions and our methods in controlling the spread of the coronavirus, there is no debate regarding the results. We have kept our people safe. After its initial stumbling, the federal government eventually did a great job of assisting states and local governments with mitigating the economic impact of the pandemic. They provided significant aid, and our administration worked diligently to place those funds directly in the hands of local businesses and individuals to the greatest extent permissible. Through the Paycheck Protection Program, over 2,000 Virgin Islands businesses received \$126 million to keep employees on the payroll and pay operating expensive.
- 0:43:57 Another 1,748 businesses were able to do the same with \$93 million they received through the Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program. Through the tireless efforts of the employees of our local Bureau of Internal Revenue and Department of Finance, CARES Act stimulus payments were paid to 47,395 eligible Virgin Islands households, totaling nearly \$79.5 million. This is the largest check run undertaken by the Virgin Islands government ever.
- 0:44:38 Utilizing additional CARES Act funding, we were able to provide 7,671 local businesses with a \$500 credit and over 44,000 households with a \$250 credit to their light bills. The YES funds, your energy stimulus, kept the lights on for many in their time of need. Thanks to the team at the Department of Human Services, we provided more than \$20 million in food assistance through the Pandemic EBT program to the families of over 14,000 Virgin Islands students. Also understanding our students' need for additional tools to meet the demands of virtual learning, we made sufficient funding available to the Board of Education to provide every single college-bound Virgin Islands graduate of 2020 a \$1,000 scholarship towards their education. The Virgin Islands Department of Labor employees have worked around the clock to assist workers who have been displaced by the economic downturn. They have processed over 17,000 unemployment claims and paid out just under \$110 million in much-needed unemployment assistance. By comparison, in prior years, the Department of Labor has never distributed more than \$30 million in any one given year and has never had more than

8,000 claimants in any one year. In fact, there are only 2,500 claimants in a typical year and \$8 million paid out in benefits. Once again, thank you to the hardworking employees of the Department of Labor.

0:46:33 This year, we set record after record in service delivery in response to the challenge of COVID-19 pandemic in the Virgin Islands. In all, more than \$400 million in federal pandemic aid was injected directly into our local economy. As 2019 concluded, the administration introduced the cradle to career and beyond.

0:47:08 This is an initiative that was scheduled to take shape in 2020 with a focus on curriculum and instruction. The year started off with the convening of meetings on early childhood education, career readiness, and workforce development. However, by March, we were closing schools, scrambling to save the school year, and identifying resources to support remote learning. COVID disrupted the 2019-2020 school year, but the Department of Education and its students and its teachers rose to the challenge. Our graduating seniors saw their prom and in-person graduating ceremonies become casualties of coronavirus, but I'm impressed by the tenacity of the class of 2020. All of those who graduated from high school during a historical global pandemic.

0:48:07 Moreover, we are pleased to report that our high school graduation rate actually increased from 62.6% in 2019 to 70.9% in 2020. The Department of Education demonstrated its flexibility and creativity by successfully facilitating its first-ever virtual graduations. Each student celebrated his or her accomplishment with family and friends, locally as well as those living abroad. Online viewership was high, and many of those who would have otherwise been unable to see or attend did so from the comfort of their homes. As we closed our campuses, losing the connection with at-risk families was of utmost concern. However, the flexibility of the school lunch program and partnerships with nonprofit entities such as My Brother's Workshop allowed the Department of Education to maintain daily contact with students and their families while continuing to distribute free, healthy, and nutritious meals.

0:49:18 From March 2020 to date, our food service workers and their support staff distributed over 580,000 meals territory-wide to school-aged children as part of their No Child Goes Hungry feeding initiative. They are among the unsung heroes of the COVID front lines, and we thank them for their service to our children in this community. While we recognize the current school years has had its expected challenges, the transition to digital spaces expanded our use of technology in the education system. It increased information accessibility for parents via collaborative platforms, through Schoology, teachers, parents, and school administrators can monitor their grades, their attendance, assignments, and overall student performance. This administration remains committed to equipping every child with a device and has already distributed 5,265 Chromebooks or tablets and 2,150 MiFi devices so those can connect to the Internet. These technological advancements are now a permanent part of our approach to education. The Department of Education has become so comfortable with the conduct of virtual events that they also conducted the annual Teacher of the Year ceremonies virtually. The events in both districts were a rousing success.

0:51:09 Tonight, I recognize and I'm thankful for the exceptional contribution of Ms. Zara O'Reilly-Bates, State Teacher of the Year 2020-2021. Congratulations also to Ms. Alicia Walters-Ramos, St. Croix District Teacher of the Year, and Miss Cristina Marie L. Cenosa, the St. Thomas St. John District Teacher of the Year 2020. We offer much appreciation to the entire staff of the Department of Education for their efforts and sacrifices made this challenging year. All educators have the primary goal of providing high-quality education for a student. And while many successfully infuse creativity and enthusiasm into teaching, the transition to virtual learning challenged educators to learn new skill. Many discovered that remote teaching required more than introducing new platforms for uploading lessons. It required fervent, active engagement with students, parents, and the integrated use of all these tools and an investment in their own professional development. I joined many classrooms virtually in St. Thomas, St. Croix, as well as St. John High School and Elementary. And let me tell you, our teachers are amazing.

0:52:59 And as such, we are recognizing the instructional staff of all public schools who have also had to make personal investments to facilitate the virtual learning of students. We will be issuing over 1,300 checks to educators across the territory this week to offset their expenses as a token of our great appreciation for their contribution. We face the challenge of acquiring and distributing digital devices, retrofitting public schools in adherence to CDC guidelines, procuring cleaning services, increasing Internet access and bandwidth to underserved students, assisting our graduating seniors, effectively supporting our teachers, and aiding our parochial and private school partners.

0:53:59 We have done remarkably well in overcoming our challenges, considering that all the odds were firmly stocked against us. Undeterred by COVID-19, school repairs and educational planning for the future continues. In the upcoming weeks, we will see the return of K-3, special education, and career and technical education students to face-to-face classroom instruction. Every precaution, every precaution will be taken for their safety. But we are asking for the support of this legislature, as well as you, the listening public, as we continue to design and modify our infrastructure to accommodate the return of all of our students.

- 0:54:51 Our commitment to stabilizing the finances of the government has begun to pay dividends. Despite the economic challenges introduced by the global response to the virus, fiscal year 2020 was a record-breaking year for revenue generation in the territory. Our income, gross receipt, and property tax collections were at the highest levels ever. Revenues from individual income, corporate income, and gross receipt taxes all increased when compared to our first year in office. the records set our first year in office were shattered in our second year in office remarkably most of this was achieved with the majority of public employees either working staggered schedules or fully remotely as part of the coronavirus protocol as an administration we have worked hard to improve the government's tax collection in fiscal year 2020 the office of the lieutenant governor collected \$37.8 million in current year property tax revenue, a 52% increase from the prior fiscal year. Perhaps even more importantly, during that same period, the tax collector's office collected an additional \$25.1 million in delinquent property tax revenue. Disaster recovery activity, consistent employment at Limetree Bay, COVID-related federal funding, and a surge in overnight guests are the major influences currently bolstering our fiscal strength. We have maintained at least 30 days cash on hand for most of last year. We hope to finally say, gone are the days of measuring cash on one hand in the single digits. As promised two years ago,
- 0:56:49 We have brought stability to this government. As the fiscal strength of our government continues to improve, so will our capacity to address our long-standing financial obligations. We are intent on paying the people first. This is our number one priority. We have put a significant dent in the backlog of income tax refunds owed to Virgin Islands taxpayers. Totalling in this past fiscal year alone, we paid 24,718 individual checks to taxpayers, totaling almost \$69 million for past due refund. This is the most income tax refunds ever paid in a single fiscal year. And we have already paid out more than \$15 million in the first quarter of this current fiscal year, finishing out our payments for 2017 and paying into tax year 2018.
- 0:58:08 we are making steady progress towards our administration goal of paying refunds to taxpayers in the same year that they file. The Economic Stability Act of 2011 reduced by 8% the salaries of all government employees making more than \$27,000.
- 0:58:39 This happened in the executive as well as the legislative branches for a two-year period. This was in response to a budget crisis during the Great Recession. The legality of that provision of the act was challenged successfully in court by two labor unions, and ultimately 5,221 government workers were affected. In all, a total of \$37.8 million is owed to these hardworking employees. It was perhaps a necessary measure at the time, but we are in a position now to make amends to the workers who endured this sacrifice. As we begin preparation for the executive budget for the upcoming fiscal year, it has become clear that we can begin paying down that obligation sooner than originally expected. If we are granted authorization to resume collection of our excise taxes by the courts, we will be able to retire the full obligation within one calendar year. The previous measures passed to address this issue would only start making payments towards the debt in 2022, and it will take 20 years at this rate to retire the debt.
- 1:00:04 The people have waited long enough. As such, I am pleased to announce tonight that we will be committing to the entire payment of the 8% pay cut with the excise taxes collected this and next fiscal year. We will be forwarding the effectuating legislation this week for this body to approve of. Rest assured, Mary, that we have not forgotten the \$10 million in retroactive pay for retirees 65 and older in the 2021 budget.
- 1:00:46 We will make every effort possible to satisfy this budget item as well. You see, our enthusiasm is only tempered by the reality that the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic economic fallout is likely to be felt in this current fiscal year. We expect revenue collections will decrease between now and the income tax filing deadline in April. Furthermore, we expect that the impact of the increased unemployment and business closures from last year to be evident in the tax collections that we're going to have this year. Unfortunately, the recent COVID stimulus package passed by Congress does not include much direct financial support to state and local governments.
- 1:01:39 the fiscal health of our government through more traditional means, belt-tightening, aggressive collections, and developing new sources of revenue, like cannabis. We must ensure that in the best of times, we work hard to make sure that in the worst of times, we can weather the storm. We are not only confronting the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, but we are also still recovering from Hurricanes Irma and Maria. This year, we'll see the completion of numerous hurricane recovery projects. The new modular facility, JFL North, at 1F Louis Hospital, should be opening this May. The completion of that project will pave the way for the demolition and rebuild of the current hospital. This will again increase access to critical health care services available to Virgin Islanders in need, and it will allow for renewed access to our people and keep health care dollars right here in the territory where they are needed.
- 1:02:52 The Department of Education completed its Territory-Wide Educational Facility Master Plan as scheduled on June 30th. This plan will guide the future investment of hundreds of millions of dollars of federal recovery funds earmarked for reconstructing the public school system in the Virgin Islands. Arthur Richards' school alone is already approved up to

\$145 million, and we're still working with FEMA to get some more dollars in there. Contracts are in place for several projects in furtherance of this plan. The Gladys Abraham Elementary School will be the first school that is modernized and will become the new home of the Raphael O. Wheatley Skills Center. The building that currently houses the skills center is being retrofitted to accommodate the students displaced by the demolition of Building C at Charlotte Amali High School. The contract for the demolition of Charlotte and Mali High School has now been awarded, and the work will begin this year. On St. Croix, the demolition of the Hurricane Ravage Arthur A. Richards Junior High School is well underway and will continue for the next eight months.

1:04:05 Demolition of the Evelyn M. Williams Elementary School, which was shuttered in 2015, is expected to be completed by December. Last year also saw the historic signing of the preliminary land swap agreement that takes the territory one step closer to realizing a K-12 school on St. John. After many years of negotiation, the National Park Service has finally agreed to provide the Virgin Islands government with a portion of park property for the construction of a new Julius Sproul School. The Department of Sports Parks and Recreation is also driving the completion of several recovery projects. The repairs and restoration of the Emil Griffith Ballpark, the Lionel Roberts Stadium on St. Thomas, and the Vincent Mason Coral Pool in Frederickstead are expected to be completed this year. The revitalization of St. Croix's Rudolph Shelterburn Agricultural Complex, locally known as the Fairground, is scheduled for completion this spring. The renovations of Government House on St. Thomas are progressing well and should be completed in December. The restoration of the territory-wide tsunami alert warning system is expected to be completed this summer. Several recovery-funded road projects on St. Croix are slated for completion this year. The final two segments of the well-traveled Melvin Evans Highway will also be completed. The much-anticipated road repairs and drainage improvements in Gallows Bay will also begin this year. Brand-new water lines have recently been installed in Frederickstead Town, and the first contract for road repairs has been executed and is ready to commence.

1:06:07 In Christianstead, a contract for the repair of the roads is also in place. The only delay in the execution of the contract is the anticipated installation of new sewer lines as part of our one-dig policy. No sense to pave the road and then have to dig it back up. We intend to commence paving of Christianstead Town once all the infrastructure impacting the road repair is installed. Finally, the repairs to Carlton Road have begun. Yes, my student friend Nakai Theodore and his mother, Lennice, you soon will have that smooth ride home, as promised.

1:06:53 On the island of St. John, the repairs and renovation of the George Simmons Terrace Senior Center are now complete, and the center reopened. Likewise, the repairs and renovation of the battery in Cruise Bay are nearly complete, and we anticipate a ribbon-cutting next month. The Envision Tomorrow Homeowner Rehabilitation Program, administered by the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority, is providing grants up to \$250,000 to rehabilitate homes that were severely damaged by Hurricanes Irma and Maria. To meet demand, we have increased the regular allocation from \$60 million to \$150 million. Currently, 689 applicants have been deemed eligible for the program, and of those applicants, 53 have already been awarded grants. Now that the program is fully operational, we look forward to awarding more and more grants this year and getting people back into their homes. No image was more iconic of the devastation of the storms of 2017 than the images of Estate Tutu High-Rise in their aftermath. Still ingrained in my mind are the missing windows of where our people used to live. While the demolition of the first five buildings at Estate Tutu is underway, Today, and in its place, a brand new \$57 million housing development has broken ground at Estate Dunum. These are just a few of the larger disaster recovery funded projects expected to be completed this year. In fiscal year 2020, we expended approximately \$339 million in federal disaster recovery fund. COVID or not, in all, we are projected to expend over \$621 million in the current fiscal year.

1:08:59 This is equivalent to 75% of our general fund budget. Indeed, it is a pleasure for me to report to this body that our physical recovery from Hurricane Irma and Maria is now in full swing. Last year, the International Economic Development Council recognized the UVI Research and Technology Park as the Economic Development Organization of the Year. While our traditional economic development incentives continue to be effective, the R.T. Park is paving the way in attracting the types of technologically driven companies that represent the new economy that we are building. The R.T. Park steadily attracted and activated new technology companies, even as we grapple with the pandemic. Thirteen new firms were reviewed and approved by the Park's Board of Directors in fiscal year 2020. Their efforts have resulted in a total of 29 new companies added as clients since September 2018. They have the potential to add more clients to their pipeline, but business development in the territory is hindered by the absence of financial institutions that are willing to help develop early stage and start-up businesses. To solve this problem, we will be sending to this body legislation to establish the Virgin Islands Catalyst Fund. This will provide gap financing to high economic development projects. The fund would issue loans to bridge the amount the borrower can obtain from more conventional sources and the amount needed to actually start and sustain their business. The fund would be administered by the R.T. Park with an initial capitalization of \$5 million. Providing support to business development in the territory ensures the creation of more jobs

for our people and the diversification of our economy. We are excited about the launch of Vision 2040 planning initiative. Vision 2040 is a community engagement planning process designed to produce a long-term economic development strategy and action plan that positions the U.S. Virgin Islands to develop a competitive business environment that is aligned with the general interests of its residents. When completed, this plan will serve as the framework that guides our economic development, not just this year, not just next year, but for the next two decades. This is the first time in the history of the Virgin Islands that we will holistically examine the systemic roadblocks that have impeded our economic growth with an eye towards identifying diverse, sustainable, and successful industries that can create a viable workforce.

- 1:12:22 It is important that as a people, we adopt a plan that outlives the tenure of any one governor and maintains a consistent course of progress upon taking office, Tregenza and I, We continued the good. We stopped the wasteful. We maintained the employment of the productive and created stability of the government. We have changed to an approach that values progress and our people over petty politics. While we have made tremendous strides over the years in diversifying our economy, tourism is still our largest industry and has the greatest impact on our economy. But as you can imagine, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative effect on our tourism product.
- 1:13:31 There have been no ship calls since March, and the ships are not anticipated to return until at least the spring, best case scenario. When they do return, we anticipate that passenger arrivals will be considerably reduced from the pre-COVID levels. While the industry recovers from the pandemic, we want to be prepared, and we continue to pursue the permits to dredge Long Bay, Crown Bay, and yes, Gallows Bay. All this permitting is on track, and we expect to get most of it done and the approvals this year. But we also believe this is the ideal time to pursue the merger of the Virgin Islands Port Authority and WICO, the West Indian Company.
- 1:14:23 WICO has been severely impacted by the lack of cruise activity and has reduced staff, salaries, and hours of operation. They are quickly approaching a financial wall that is catalyzing the need for this consolidation. WICO is currently a wholly owned subsidiary of the Public Finance Authority. We are proposing that this ownership interest be transferred to the Port Authority and that WICO be given full responsibility for the management of all cruise ports in the territory. This just makes sense and would create synergy in our efforts to promote the Virgin Islands as one destination in the cruise industry.
- 1:15:09 We have begun the discussions about the most efficient way to make this transfer and we'll be executing this long-awaited merger. The new structure will be efficient and finally allow the Virgin Islands to negotiate all three major ports in both districts under one unified vantage point. The Virgin Islands has not yet seen the return of the traditional hotel rooms that were lost during Hurricanes Irma and Maria. We had approximately 4,500 traditional rooms prior to 2017, and we currently have about 2,450. The drop-off of the leisure travel market in the midst of the pandemic has encouraged the delay of several hotel renovation projects. The continued postponement of major properties coming back online, such as Marriott, have contributed to the delay in our revenue growth. However, there are certain reasons to be optimistic about our tourism product. Hotel tax revenues were up year over year in fiscal 2020 versus fiscal year 2019 until the onset of the pandemic closures in March. We are expecting the reopening of Divi Carina Bay and Carambola Beach Resort on St. Croix this year.
- 1:16:36 We are currently evaluating proposals for the redevelopment of Protestant Key Hotel on the Key in Christianstead Harbor. The Port Authority is also in active negotiation with Global Solutions LLC to construct a 120 to 140-bedroom hotel at the Henry Rolson Airport on St. Croix. On St. Thomas, both Lymetree Beach and Club Windham Elysian Beach Resort have reopened with newly renovated rooms. Construction of the 68-room boutique resort at the Preserve at Botany Bay is anticipated to start this July. This is a \$25 million private sector capital investment projected to create at least 45 full-time jobs in the St. Thomas-St. John District. The new Lavango Resort and Beach Club opened its doors this past December. I visited Lavango Quay in December and was wowed with the beauty of the property, its sensitivity to the environment, and its commitment to employing Virgin Islanders. The Brian Roach administration, the Snyder family who owns the property, and the St. John community have all worked closely together to bring this project to fruition. And I am pleased to see the resort open as scheduled, as promised.
- 1:17:56 They now hope to complete the construction of four clusters of cottages and ecotents by December 2021. And by 2024, they expect to have a 70-bedroom unit in operation. These are all positive developments in revising our tourism product. We understand that the tremendous pressure that people in the hospitality and industry throughout the territory are under, our tour operators, our restaurant workers, people who work on the hotel, been suffering for the last eight months, ten months, even with all the aid we got. But we know that in this St. John's, St. Thomas district especially, it is well known that the extra revenue created by hotels have provided many workers with secondary jobs.

- 1:18:55 Jobs that send their children to school, put food on their tables, and pay their rent. We have worked tirelessly with developer after developer, financier, going back and forth with our economic development authority to make sure that we are doing everything within our power to regain these room nights as soon as possible. We have worked to use our economic development tools and our influence to ensure that the Marriott and Coneal and Sugar Bay all come back online as quickly as possible. Perhaps the best news tonight is that Diamond Rock, the owners of the Marriott Frenchman Reef, anticipate that construction will restart this summer.
- 1:19:41 The Caneel Bay Resort has resumed negotiation with the National Park Service, and now they see a clear pathway to the reconstruction of this world-famous resort. We know that the private sector is struggling with its recovery, and we will continue to bring them along as partners in our territorial recovery. On two occasions last year, we had to order the temporary halt on the booking of leisure guests. While this significantly helped to keep our COVID numbers low, it had the anticipated impact of quickly and dramatically reducing airlift into the territory. The incoming passenger loads significantly declined in mid-March at both airports.
- 1:20:28 Daily passenger arrivals into St. Thomas dropped from nearly 2,400 passengers a day on March 14th to less than 100 passengers by the end of March. However, when the pandemic restrictions on leisure travel were relaxed, following the second shutdown in August, airlift increased exponentially. St. Thomas winter capacity is approaching pre-hurricane levels of 2017. St. Croix capacity has long surpassed the 2017 levels. Airlines continue to bring back service with increased frequency, and additional carriers are introducing service from the mainland. We continue to receive calls and commitments for new flights. And just last week, we added another direct flight from Miami, courtesy of Frontier Airlines, and we thank them for it. The already burgeoning commercial flights are complemented by the expansion of our jet services in the territory. Last October, with the Port Authority welcome fixed base operator, Standard Aviation, and their world-class 28,000-square-foot hangar and aviation facility to the Sierra Lea King Airport. This was a public-private partnership between the Port Authority and Standard Aviation. This hangar is the largest freestanding building in the Caribbean and can accommodate some of the largest luxury business jets on the markets. Standard Aviation is providing concierge to the private jets, their crews, and their high-end guests. A drive past the Henry Rosen Airport will reveal the steel skeleton of yet another FBO flight center on St. Croix. Eagle Aviation will complete its hangar by the end of June and are already getting calls about jet services on the big land.
- 1:22:27 We support the expansion of our private jet industry as we ultimately gain from the aviation fees, the purchases of fuel, and the benefit of additional overnight guests in the territory, adding dollars to our economy. Albert Einstein said, In the midst of every crisis lies great opportunity. And in the midst of the pandemic, we seize the opportunity to revitalize our marine industry. We welcome Caribbean sailors to the safe haven of our shores when they were denied access by other countries. We managed the safe integration of those sailors and registered over 200 new vessels in the process. The BVI is closed to marine traffic, and it has created an unprecedented amount of activity for the marine industry in the territory. The Moorings, one of the larger charter companies, recently announced its St. Thomas opening, and for the first time in recent memory, Charter vessel activity has increased on St. Croix. In our efforts to see the rise of the blue economy, we forwarded our administration's mooring project permit to the legislature earlier this month. This project will add over 200 new moorings to the territory. As soon as approved, we can start the project, which will take boats out of Megan's and other bays and put them into more appropriate mooring areas.
- 1:24:01 Additionally, we have sent legislation to shore up our fishing and our leisure boating industry. On St. Croix, we have included funding provisions for the repair of King's Alley Pier, has been gone now for a long time, the Gallows Bay Fisherman's Dock in front of the world-famous Panchis, and the repair of the boat ramp located in Crouse Lagoon for our fishermen in profit. Repairs at Altona Lagoon is managed by federal funds, and that too will take place this year. The \$1.75 million for the Ann Abramson Pier South Tender Landing will be allocated this year from the Diageo Community Facilities. This is another pier on the side of the Frederickstead Pier. The addition of this pier will not only assist our scuba shops and dive enthusiasts, but will now provide access to our economy from charter vessels that are visiting Frederickstead with increased frequency. We are especially proud of the completion of the Lorraine Fish Market, and we will be having a ribbon-cutting next month. we will continue to invest in leisure, recreation, and commercial marine infrastructure. On St. John, we have finally completed the approval for Summer's End Marina Project, a permit that was over six years old.
- 1:25:34 I thank the legislature for their vote of confidence to bring financial, social, and job opportunities to Coral Bay. We recognize that this is a controversial project. a controversial project for some St. Jonians. But we will continue to work with all of the residents, the landowners, the developers, to ensure that this is a successful project. To demonstrate the success and appeal of our destination, the Virgin Islands has received the Destination of the Year Award from Caribbean Journal. The demand for our destination is greater than ever, And as normalcy returns, the Department of Tourism is

prepared to reignite its marketing campaigns to further encourage the return of leisure travel to the territory. A \$2 million contract has been executed to resume both the Reconnect with Paradise, which is a territory-wide campaign, and the St. Croix-specific Vibe Like No Other campaign. Coupled with our addition of luxury travel services and marine infrastructure, this will pay dividends and tourism dollars for years to come. Without a doubt, the Virgin Islands is poised to rebound from this pandemic stronger than any of our neighbors in this region.

1:27:00 after considerable delay lime tree bay is finally on the verge of restarting the refinery the refinery has been idle since 2012 and work to restart it began in 2018 in october lime tree received a shipment of crude oil and started commissioning equipment in preparation of to restart the refining. Once the refinery starts, that guarantees the government about seven million dollars a year in payments. We have carefully monitored the progress of the restart as Lime Tree Bay, the EPA, DPNR, and the U.S. Department of Justice work meticulously with my office lobbyists, the delegates in in Washington and here, to make sure that we got the federal air quality standards met. As refining begins, we will make sure and keep monitoring to continue to ensure that the public health of St. Croix residents is protected from any harm.

1:28:18 This past year saw the emergence of industrial hemp as a new industry within the agricultural sector. My administration has successfully established the Hemp Commission and implemented the industrial hemp laws that have been dormant on the books since 2016. The members of the Commission worked diligently with my office to establish the parameters for the proper regulation of the industry. On May 27th, the United States Department of Agriculture approved the Virgin Islands Hemp Production Program, thereby authorizing the local Department of Agriculture and Hemp Commission to issue licenses for hemp cultivation. On December 23rd, the Commission approved the first commercial hemp grower license and the first hemp seed distributor license in the Virgin Islands. Cushion Hemp Farm's Triple LP intends to cultivate and harvest 100 acres of CBD-rich industrial hemp. It is anticipated that the Virgin Islands hemp industry will ultimately create hundreds of jobs and the diversity of economy that provides the resilience for our people.

1:29:41 In Estate Bethlehem, we are adding a vital component to our efforts to resuscitate our agricultural industry. The Fresh Ministries Aquaponics Center is poised to be the model for future of affordable and sustainable agriculture in the territory. Founder and CEO of Fresh Ministries, Reverend Dr. Robert Lee III, through the Desmond Tutu Program to End Global Hunger, and a \$2 million grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration broke ground in June of 2020. This project, in partnership with Farmers in Action, was provided a \$300,000 local matching fund by the government of the Virgin Islands. It boasts over 50,000 square feet of greenhouse space and will be used as a training center to teach Virgin Islanders the business of aquaponics. Aquaponics does not require an excessive amount of energy to facilitate success A 2,000 square foot greenhouse can generate upwards of \$100,000 annually in produce and fresh fish We are extremely excited to be part of this initiative And thank Reverend Dr. Lee and the farmers in action for their leadership Food safety and food security continue to be a priority, and our administration's support of agriculture demonstrates this. We continue to support food production while putting underutilized agricultural lands to use and creating jobs while diversifying our economy. As our economic development initiatives continue to create job opportunities and our larger hurricane recovery projects begin to break ground, there is a growing need for skilled workers throughout the Virgin Islands.

1:31:37 The jobs are there, but they will not fully benefit Virgin Islanders unless we are able to produce trained and prepared workers to meet these employment needs. We recognize the coming crisis, and we are prepared to address it. With the support of the Department of Labor, this year I will be rolling out the \$10 million Skills for Today on-the-Job training program. This program will train a total of 625 individuals over the next 24 months. The skills today, this is a program that's going to take people off our corners, off our couches, off of being idle and into jobs that not only train them, but pay them while they do it. The skills for today program complements our ongoing registered apprenticeship program.

1:32:33 Last year, the Brian Roach administration introduced our first registered apprenticeship sponsor in the territory, Gold Coast Yachts. Today, we have registered apprenticeship sponsors in health care, hospitality, and the marine industry. I am thankful to the employers that participate, and I encourage all employers in the territory to partner with the Department of Labor as a registered apprentice. Workforce development creates resilient people and leads to sustainable economic growth. our workforce developments, our workforce development efforts will be in overdrive in 2021.

1:33:20 My administration inherited a utility that was suffering from years of deferred maintenance and the ill effects of having its largest customer, the government of the Virgin Islands, continually delinquent on making payments. As our sole public power provider, the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority was in imminent danger of financial collapse and would have surely taken the rest of the government with it. This was particularly tragic considering the hundreds of millions of dollars earmarked by the federal government since 2017 to be invested into WAPA's infrastructure.

- 1:34:05 WAPA has entered into a \$75 million contract with Wartzilla, a global leader in smart technologies, for the engineering, procurement, and construction of four new generators. This also includes a battery storage system at the St. Thomas Randolph-Harley power plant. These units will be on the ground here in St. Thomas by the end of June. This project is a critical milestone in WAPA's transformation and utilizes 100% federal funds provided by HUD. It will replace the aging generators and the rented equipment that WAPA has relied on for decades. The new generators will greatly increase reliability and efficiency of the poly power plants and reduce maintenance and fuel costs, and yes, your power bill too. The 18-megawatt-hour battery storage is an evolution in technology for WAPA, providing instantaneous standby capacity in case and when that generator trips.
- 1:35:17 It also allows for a better integration of renewable energy systems onto the power grid. WAPA's \$742 million of mitigation projects include backup generators and the installation of composite poles across the territory. Projects to place electrical lines underground in both districts, both St. Croix and St. John, will begin in February. Phase 1 of the restoration of the St. Thomas East End substation was completed in July 2020, and Phase 2 is expected to be completed this year.
- 1:35:55 These investments will undoubtedly increase the reliability of our power system. Waterline projects in Estates Clifton Hill, Hannah's Rest, and Campo Rico will replace the corroded iron pipes currently providing water to these communities with new PVC piping. This will help solve the issues of the brown water that customers have been complaining about for years. It will also help us save some revenue by taking care of the leaks. Yes, yes, this is progress. But regrettably, WAPA is still plagued with management inefficiencies. And way too many of them. WAPA has a tremendous opportunity to transform itself if it can only overcome its immediate challenges. Most glaring is its failures within their billing system. Despite the installation of smart meters and automated metering infrastructure several years ago, we are still faced with delayed and estimated billing and billing errors. This administration has given the authority stability, and the support necessary to make changes.
- 1:37:22 We are encouraged by the improvements to date, but our customers deserve better. I have called on WAPA's board to fully investigate the lingering issues and demonstrate accountability and give ratepayers reasonable rates. Customers must feel confident that what is built is what is owed. Maintenance of our roadways is a constant effort.
- 1:37:55 On St. Thomas, critical road repairs have been completed at Fortuna Bay, Bovoni, Eastern Cemetery, Estate Peterborg, Manasseh Hill Road, and Frenchtown. Road improvements are currently underway at Crown Bay. The Estate Thomas Infrastructure Project, Phase 1, is scheduled to start, and additional paving will be done on the Bolongo Bay Drainage Infrastructure Project. This year, we'll also see the completion, years in the making, of two long-standing road projects, the Main Street Enhancement Project and the Veterans Drive, Phase 1. Both will enhance the traffic flow and aesthetics of downtown Charlotte and Mali. We already see how the expansion of the waterfront project has improved the quality of life for citizens in this district, as it is now utilized for walking, cycling, running, and even the leisure stroll.
- 1:38:52 Repairs to Estate Adrian Road are in progress in St. John, as well as we have allocated \$2.8 million to repair Center Line Road. Extensive road repairs on St. Croix were completed in Estate Herman Hill, Rattan, Richmond, Tipperary, Mount Union, Sally's Fancy, Cyan Farm, on Hess Road, West Airport Road, and the Scenic Road. In the upcoming year, work will begin on the new Clifton Hill Road, Route 75, and over five miles of Mahogany Road will be paved. I also thank the members of the 33rd Legislature for making \$4.5 million available from the St. Croix Capital Improvement Fund to pave roads in Estates Lorraine, Bugbee Hole, Herman Hill, and St. George.
- 1:39:43 We are intent on providing traffic and pavement relief to our residents in both districts. We are dedicating a brand new \$20 million from the Internal Revenue Matching Fund Debt Service reserved to fix these problems. The traffic along the Weymouth-Rimer Highway leading into Fort Milliner has become increasingly unbearable. As such, we are dedicating \$4 million to the completion of the Leonardo-Nardo Trotman Drive, which should ease the traffic congestion in this area.
- 1:40:23 I have consulted with the Senate President, Donna Fred Gregory, and we are also allotting another \$14 million to repair roads on all three islands, and those roads will be decided by the Senate. An additional \$2 million will be set aside for the revitalization of the Hull Bay boat ramp and new parking areas so that our people will have place to put their boats when they go fishing. The balance of that money will also be dedicated to other boat ramps in Altona and other places in St. Thomas, Freedom Hoy, in order to facilitate marine and fishing in St. Thomas, St. John District. These are not hasty patching jobs. These are carefully planned and properly executed road repairs, as we make a concerted effort to raise the standard for paving road projects in the territory. the virgin islands port authority continues to make major investments in our port infrastructure not talk not plans but completed projects 2021 promises to be another busy year for the port Authority. Construction has begun on a \$24 million cargo terminal and dock improvements at St. Croix's Gordon A. Finch Molasses Pier. When the project is completed later this year, all cargo operations will move from Gallows Bay to the Molasses Pier. Gallows Bay Port will then realize its full potential as a premium passenger facility catering to mini

cruise ships and luxury

- 1:42:19 yachts. An \$8.6 million terminal expansion and modernization at the Henry E. Rosen Airport is underway. I thank the 33rd Legislature again for supporting this project by appropriating \$1.6 million in local matching funds. This project will upgrade the overall decor of the departure terminal and add modern amenities. Additionally, the National Defense Authorization Act signed into law this past December includes \$11 million for the construction of an administrative building and \$28 million for the construction of an Army Aviation Support Facility at the Rosen Airport. This facility will support the maintenance and refueling of visiting military aircraft conducting military operations, disaster relief, and humanitarian efforts in the region.
- 1:43:15 Within the next month, the Port Authority will begin work on the \$26.8 million transportation center at the Serey King Airport with more than 600 parking spaces and a dedicated location for ground transportation and car rental operations. Construction also begins this year on a new U.S. Customs and Border Protection Facility at the Ehrman v. Federicks Marine Terminal in Red Hook. Travelers will now clear customs in St. Thomas without first having to go to St. John. Persistence always pays off. In 2019, we visited the U.S. Department of Commerce along with Tropical Shipping and Crowley and briefed them on the importance of our cargo infrastructure. Our efforts were not in vain, as we won not one, but two federal grants for the same project. We were advised that we had to decline one.
- 1:44:18 The Port Authority was awarded a U.S. Department of Transportation Infrastructure Grant for \$21.9 million to rebuild and expand cargo handling and storage infrastructure at the Crown Bay Cargo Terminal. Crown Bay serves as a major shipment port for cargo being shipped to many of the other Caribbean islands. We expect that construction to begin this year. This expansion at Crown Bay will be complemented by the redevelopment of Adelita Cancrine and adjacent properties for port expansion. Rents generated by these new properties will be reinvested in the Department of Education's school maintenance program, making this a win-win for the Virgin Islands. My administration continues to clear a pathway to prosperity by making significant investments to modernize our infrastructure.
- 1:45:23 For our car racing enthusiasts, we have some good news. We appropriated \$500,000 last year to restore the racing surface and secured a generous donation of an additional 2.57 acres of property from the adjacent Renaissance Park to expand the facility. I want to thank Renaissance for their donation. I will submit to the Senate President a request for approval to use the Community Facilities Trust account at Diageo for an additional \$675,000 to make necessary track improvements. With that appropriation, car racing will officially return to the U.S. Virgin Islands. The contract for the operation of our racetracks between the government and the vigil operations that was ratified by the 31st legislature in 2016 has been plagued with legal problems from the very beginning a matter of fact before they even passed it they knew that it was full of problems.
- 1:46:36 Firstly, the former operator on St. Croix, Traxco, had their agreement prematurely terminated and sued to reinforce their rights. The settlement of the lawsuit granted Traxco authority to run the Racino on St. Croix for two years after the VIGL agreement went into effect. Then the FAA questioned the use of the property of the Randall-Doc James track for non-aviation purposes. We went to bat for that, and we got through. The construction permits were held up until the Port Authority could resolve that manner.
- 1:47:13 After that, the coastal zone management permits were issued, and the permit for Clinton-Phipps racetrack was appealed to the Board of Land Use Appeals. Coupled with all of that going on, Southland Gaming of St. Thomas then filed a suit against the government for violating their contract for the exclusive right to operate video lottery terminals on St. Thomas. Let it be known that I and this administration have done its best to enforce this agreement as it was negotiated in 2016, even as it has become apparent that all the parties and the affected stakeholders are dissatisfied.
- 1:48:01 I have fought at every turn to resume live horse racing to the Virgin Islands. In fact, I share the vision of the former administration in having a unified racing industry on St. Thomas, as well as on St. Croix, with the world-class venues and the purses to match. We appreciate VIGL's contribution to the community thus far. But if you know me, then you know I cannot be bullied.
- 1:48:37 I will not be bullied into breaching a still legally binding agreement to the benefit of one party and the detriment of Virgin Islands taxpayers to the tune of \$8 million. Nor will I negotiate modifications to the agreement in the media. If the agreement is to be modified, then that is to be done at the negotiating table. And I certainly will be seeking to protect the interests of the Virgin Islands government, not any business that come here.
- 1:49:34 This matter is currently in the court and we are in mediation. And I really hope that this process resolves the disputes so that horse racing can return not just to St. Croix, but to the entire Virgin Islands. Thank you. Likewise. Thank you. There we go.

- 1:50:10 Likewise, we continue our efforts to reconstruct Polly Joseph Stadium. While at times I have expressed my concerns about the rising costs of this project over the last six years, it went from \$14 million to \$40 million. But I have never wavered from my commitment to see this project finished. Last year, we purchased six acres in Estate LaGrange.
- 1:50:39 to facilitate the completion of this project. Prior to FEMA's halt to the project, we have already installed the foundation. Unfortunately, from the original design, a part of the stadium is to be constructed within a floodplain. This has added some degree of complexity to this project. We anticipate that FEMA will approve the Conditional Letter of Map Revision, or CLOMAR, like you heard people referring to. But we will also and we figure that by May we will be starting again on the project but we also want to let you know that we'll be coming back to the legislature for another three million right Frankie J to add those amenities that are needed to improve the quality of the project that we have put forward this is the third administration one two three that has grappled with this project. But trust me, this time, we will get it done.
- 1:51:52 We have invested in our sporting infrastructure and resurrected the law that creates the Sports Commission. That legislation, unenacted since 2014, but I have fully constituted the Commission. It is tasked with not only developing a sports tourism plan for the territory, but developing a sports and a tourism plan for Pali Joseph Stadium that will make it a worthwhile investment. Providing housing opportunities for Virgin Islanders to become homeowners is ultimately what the VI Housing Finance Authority does best. After a brief hiatus, they were back at it in 2020. The Authority broke ground in October on a 57 single-family home subdivision in Estate Fortuna called Wild Pineapple. With its beautiful vistas of St. Thomas, Wild Pineapple is the HFA's newest subdivision since the completion of Whispering Hills subdivision in Estate Dunu in 2015. The Authority will also be constructing 16 additional homes in the Whispering Hills community and additional homes in Mount Pleasant West and Estate Bon Esperance subdivisions in St. Croix. Megan's Junction 2 will consist of 60 new low-income tax credit rental apartments that are contained in a nine-story building on St. Thomas. The \$35 million development is slated to be completed by June. Meanwhile, the Virgin Islands Housing Authority has begun to implement its asset repositioning plan and revamp its stock of low-income housing. It completed phase three of Louis E. Brown villas this past year. The phase included 90 multi-family apartments and completes the redevelopment of the beautiful Louis E. Brown community on St. Croix. This year, work is scheduled on the renovation of Walter I.M. Hodge Pavilion in Frederickstead. The project will include an exterior facelift of the buildings and overall site beautification. With the commitment to this project, 250 units will be rehabilitated, and the future of this community and its rich history are no longer in doubt. Adding to the good news is that the authority is also preparing to commence roof repairs in Michael J. Kerwin Terrace, Paul and Pearson Garden,
- 1:54:19 and Contant Noles communities in St. Thomas. We launched our Healthier Horizons initiative last year in an effort to drive changes in public health policy that would facilitate better health care outcomes for our people. The cornerstone of that effort was our comprehensive legislative proposal to address the needs of adults and children in the Virgin Islands who suffer from behavioral health challenges. We refer to that legislation as the Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Act. The bill clarifies the roles of the Departments of Health, Human Services, VIPD, the Bureau of Corrections, and other agencies that work with persons with behavioral health issues.
- 1:55:07 It facilitates the expansion of behavioral health services in the territory and addresses the collaboration of the public and the private partners. This important bill helps us to get a grip on not only behavioral health issues, but on the chronic homelessness and danger to the community that often results from these behavioral health issues. We sent that legislation to the 33rd Legislature on January 19, 2020. An entire year went by without the bill being afforded a hearing. Many stakeholders have contributed to this effort and support the implementation. As such, we have resubmitted this legislation. I remain hopeful that the members of the 34th legislature are sufficiently concerned about the matter of behavioral health to finally give this bill a hearing and a proper consideration. We continue to advocate for the Senate action to integrate emergency medical services with the Virgin Islands Fire Service. Action on this legislation is critical to the health and well-being of our residents. Having FHIR and EMS respond from strategically positioned stations will enable our first responders to reach those in critical needs in a shorter time and may save lives. It also augments the staffing available to provide emergency medical response. The model is already successful. And in effect, on St. John, year after year, we continue to witness instances that had this been done, most of those Virgin Islanders who got into trouble would have been alive today. Governor Juan Luis signed Executive Order 233 in 1979, providing for the licensure of emergency medical technicians in the Virgin Islands by the Department of Health. To this very day, 41 years later, the executive order remains the sole legal authority of emergency medical services in the Virgin Islands.
- 1:57:23 My office, the Department of Health, and the Division of Fire Services have spent considerable time leading a multi-agency effort to plan and coordinate fire EMS integration. We have thought through the budgetary concerns, operational concerns, collective bargaining impacts, and legal framework necessary to do this successfully. That

coordination is embodied in the bills we have drafted that both effectuate the merger and create a system to regulate the conduct of emergency medical services. In the absence of legislative action on those bills, I will be issuing an executive order to amend Executive Order 233-1979 and create the new, integrated Virgin Islands Fire and Emergency Medical Services. Too many people have died. The time has come to make the change.

- 1:58:31 We began our efforts to modernize the telemedicine provisions in the Virgin Islands Code prior to COVID-19 outbreak last year. Since then, the benefit of telemedicine has become evident. We have drafted the Telehealth Act, establishing licensing, rules, standards of practice for telehealth providers, and authorizing telehealth providers to use telehealth to treat patients. This provides Virgin Islanders with increased access to health care options from remote providers. We will be submitting that legislation for consideration by this body. The Association's health plan is a new path for hardworking Virgin Islanders to access health care coverage by giving choice and competition in the territory and strengthening the negotiating power with providers from larger risk pools. This plan allows small businesses to band together to purchase the types of coverage available to large employers. And still, these will be less expensive and be better tailored to the needs of that small business. Business owners without any employees can join the plan and get health care insurance for them and their family. The Office of the Governor has been working to vet health insurance carriers to provide coverage for the association's health plan members. Five organizations have already opted in as members. The St. Thomas, St. John, and the St. Croix Chambers of Commerce, the USVI Hotel and Tourism Association, and the VI Bar and the VI Realtors Association. These are just four of the 11 measures that we are championing as part of Healthier Horizon Initiative. For while we can have paid people, it's no good if they're not healthy people and they're enjoying their livelihoods here in the Virgin Islands. The Virgin Islands Police Department continues to improve its performance in addressing violent crime, violent crime. Last year, VIPD arrested 21 homicide suspects. That is progress when compared to prior years. Sadly, many homicide suspects are themselves murdered before they
- 2:00:54 can be brought to justice, leaving friends and families of the victims with no closure. Through traffic stops and other initiatives, we took 175 illegal guns off the streets last year. More importantly, those stops flagged numerous individuals who were engaged in the irresponsible act of purchasing and carrying guns that were unregistered. Also, we are pleased to say that VIPD demonstrated its resolve by arresting, for the first time on a New Year's Eve night, Eight individuals and confiscating 17 unlicensed firearms on New Year's Eve never before happened in the Virgin Islands.
- 2:01:36 We have zero tolerance for the celebratory gunfire that unnerves and endangers us, our residents, every year on that day. We continue to employ technology to augment our limited human resources. This past year, we restored the ShotSpotter gunshot detection system. and the first phase of our public surveillance camera system will be operational this summer. Additionally, our federal partners have also provided resources to assist our investigators in ballistic and firearms detection, working hand-in-glove step-by-step with our federal partners to make sure that we're making arrests and taking violent criminals off the street.
- 2:02:22 We are stepping up our efforts to intercept firearms that are being illegally smuggled through our ports of entry, mainly our airports. To achieve this, we will forge in partnerships with our airline partners and solidify coordination among relevant enforcement agencies. We look forward to submitting legislation to complement our efforts. The proposed legislation seeks to clarify licensing requirements and declaration processes for transporting firearms, ammunition, and accessories into the territory. Further, we will seek to require 24 hours' notice of intent to import firearms into the territory to facilitate VIPD search and declaration and arrest these people at the airport. The Virgin Islands Police Department is chronically understaffed. Every single governor has said that.
- 2:03:16 We are simply unable to recruit and train officers fast enough to replace those who are leaving the force. However, we have developed strategies to augment VIPD's law enforcement presence while we pursue more long-term recruiting strategies. Last year saw the active return of the police auxiliary. The auxiliary has already onboarded its first six officers and has 20 more on the way. Auxiliary officers serve as police officers doing small policing around the territory. This year we are introducing the Community Service Officer Program. This program will give individuals interested in law enforcement careers and opportunity to serve in the entry-level patrolling positions without first going through the Peace Officer Training Regiment. We're using these people for COVID management and parking tickets and general traffic control. The Virgin Islands government is hiring police officers, police auxiliary, and community service officers. Additionally, we will soon implement a mandate requiring peace officers throughout the executive branch to serve at least 16 regular hours, non-overtime per month, on patrol with VIPD. This will drastically increase VIPD's presence, manpower, and policing capabilities. Our police officers need support, and we are working hard to get them the resources and manpower they need. But as we work to increase our law enforcement capacity, We recognize that the causes of violent crime are rooted in socioeconomic challenges confronting our community. As such, purely law enforcement approach to violent crime is reactionary and ultimately ineffective. We know it is a small, a very small minority of

individuals who drive the majority of violent crime activity in our territory. Therefore, we must tackle this problem with a targeted, community-based approach that provides strategically resources and the support for our at-risk neighborhoods and our at-risk individuals. The 33rd legislature took up the consideration of the creation of an Office of Gun Violence Prevention and passed the measure during their final session. I signed this legislation last week, and it is now law. This office will lead a community-based partnership between law enforcement, social service providers, community leaders, the clergy, and others in an effort to interrupt violence before it leads to bloodshed on our streets.

2:06:07 I want to say a special thank you to former Senator, unfortunately, Myron Jackson, for really pushing and making sure that we got this measure before he left offices. We have aggressively been pursuing solutions to violent crime in our community. But as Virgin Islanders, we must also be willing to hold each other accountable. This past year saw increased use of Crime Stoppers, which led to apprehending criminals and solving crimes. If you see something, say something. It's more than a catchy slogan. It's a call to action. It begins with you simply calling 911 to report gunshots fired in your location. You are a critical resource to combating criminal activity in our community. We must stop accepting and embracing the criminal element living amongst us. We must let them know that their chosen lifestyle is destructive to the culture and the values that Virgin Islanders pride themselves on. And it will not be tolerated. We must commit to making life as uncomfortable for them as they make it for us. Those residents harboring, enabling, and benefiting from persons participating in illicit activities will also be sought out and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. As leaders in the community, Senators, I urge you to join me in making that as clear as possible to our constituents at every opportunity you are given to.

2:07:48 We have to stand as one community against crime. We must also remember that not all criminals carry guns and create mayhem in public spaces. Some criminals conduct their business very quietly by trafficking drugs, embezzling money, defrauding government systems, or receiving kickbacks on government contracts. Under the Brian Roach administration, all crime, especially public corruption, is put on notice. We only received funding for the Medicaid Fraud Prevention Unit last year, and already we are uncovering perpetrators and making arrests. This year you will see even more arrests as we start to conclude our investigations that have started. That is why I lobby so strong for the legislature to fund the White Collar Crime Unit, Corruption, in any form, erodes the trust of the people and their faith in us as public servants.

2:09:02 Last year, the government employees' retirement system sold off \$120 million in assets. There is now less than \$455 million remaining in the portfolio. This year, we will likely sell off even more. The system is in an accelerating death spiral. And for every day that goes by without taking definitive action to reverse the failing of the government retirement system, the decisions that ultimately need to be made become more painful and more costly. We all know this. We should also know that if the pension system fails, it will affect far more than just the annuities of the retirees. The entire Virgin Islands economy will suffer the loss of over \$200 million annually.

2:10:06 Last year, I went to the legislature three times in an effort to reduce our debt and contribute over \$400 million in cash to our ailing retirement system. The refinancing of our debt would have given us the opportunity to take a significant step towards solving this problem. The original two measures that would have allowed us to realign our debt for more reasonable payments in the first 10 years. Yes, yes, we would have to repay more in the last 10 years. But realize that there is no way out of this problem that is not a painful one. We have been out of the bond market for over 10 years, and the offering of the previous administration, just four years ago, failed to get any traction. Although we were hamstrung by the deadlines of the first authorization, which this body gave us, it is important to note that we were securing a bond that was actually already selling at 25% cheaper interest rate, a lower interest rate, than the last time we went to the bond market and had a decent rating.

2:11:27 So we were able to get, even though we hadn't had a decent bond rating in 12 years, we were still able to command the interest rate that was 25% to 30% lower than what we had then. This is a huge accomplishment. Not for me, for the Virgin Islands. The adage, try, try, and try again, is a mainstay of the Brian Roach administration. And we will not stop trying to identify financially prudent initiatives if it is of the benefit to the people of the Virgin Islands. While it may give some comfort, some small comfort, to dismiss the warnings of the 42% cut that the GRS board makes, and call it scare tactics and question, what's the rush? Every day that we wait, it costs the GRS \$329,000.

2:12:35 Do the math. \$120 million divided by 365 days. \$329,000 every day as the system moves steadily towards insolvency. The GRS Board of Trustees has made it clear. They do not have the authority to avert this reality, nor do I. Only this legislative body can grant us the necessary authorization to take the actions necessary to infuse cash in the system and restructure its benefits packages for the long term.

2:13:13 Only this body. It is why I sent for consideration by the body three times, each time making significant amendments to satisfy the concerns of the Senate. Our neighbors in Puerto Rico were able to refinance their bonds, while the same opportunity, sadly, was not afforded to Virgin Islanders. We have some additional solutions we will present to the Senate

this year, including the resubmittal of the cannabis legislation. But none of these will be as straightforward or as immediate as a refunding of the Internal Revenue Matching Fund bonds.

2:13:52 When we fail to act, we lost \$285 million in savings, the opportunity to access another \$155 million in cash, currently held in reserve at the request of our investors. the chance to re-access the credit market and to get positive attention of the larger rating agencies. I stand patient, willing, to work with the legislature to come up with a solution to these problems. But let's make sure that we work together because the people, the people are counting on us. What a year. What a tribulation.

2:14:36 Thank God 2020 is over. Over the last year, we have seen a global pandemic, national instability, riots in our city, because black lives, they do matter. Civil unrest as radicals attempted to kidnap governors and even storm the Capitol in D.C. Economies shut down and hospitals overrun. Debt tolls over 4,000 Americans dying in a single day from coronavirus. Volcanoes in the Caribbean, devastating hurricanes in the southern United States, and the coronavirus raging on. Last year, the cabinet and I started the year in prayer on the day preceding the state of the territory. as we did this year we have been truly blessed in the face of life-changing adversity to be in quarantine in quarantine surrounded by awesome people beautiful weather and the gentle and iridescent caribbean sea thank you so much to each of my cabinet members and all the staff members in the office of governor and lieutenant governor for your valiant efforts in meeting the many challenges of 2020. All of our fears, all of our fears about our coffers running out, pay less paydays government layoffs four-day work weeks were dismissed as we saw this administration conservative money management techniques diligent tax collection and the support of you the people pay off working together as many in this great nation wonder and ponder on how they will make it through this year 2021 in the virgin islands we have a real plan and we are confident that we can execute on it with the help of this body and the support of our people we will continue

2:17:11 to be successful because we lead the caribbean and the nation in pandemic management and we will become leaders in other rights and other endeavors it is contrary in our culture to acknowledge that we are indeed doing well ask any virgin islander how are you doing today man you are likely to hear, I saw so, hanging on, idea, not as good as you, I see, I see, ni bien, ni mal. But the reality is, we must start to acknowledge that in most instances, not in all instances, but in most instances, we are better off than most, that our cup is half full as often as it is half-effort empty. We must recognize that today is a great day, and tomorrow promises to be even better. We must not hesitate to acknowledge that we are a blessed people with a long legacy of overcoming challenges, great challenges, by God's mercy, His grace, and our resilience. During the January 20th inauguration of Biden-Harris, we watched with great pride National Youth Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman recite her poem, The Hill We Climb. But there are words, they not only ring true in D.C., you hear everybody posting them on Facebook and sending them to one another, they have to ring true here at home. There is always light if only we are brave enough to see it, if only we are brave enough to be it.

2:19:07 We are resilient and our territory is resurgent, succeeding against the odds and preparing for the next 20 years of progress. God bless you and God bless the Virgin Islands. Thank you. Governor, on behalf of the members of the 34th legislature, we thank you for delivering your third State of the Territory address, and of course, we look forward to working with you on behalf of the people of the United States Virgin Islands. Thank you.

2:20:23 Thank you. We ask that everyone please remain standing as the Honourable Governor, Dr. Brian Jr., and Lieutenant Governor Shurgenza Roach, parts of the chambers.

2:21:23 Thank you. Thank you.

2:22:23 Please be seated. As we wrap up this evening's proceedings, I wish again to thank the Governor again for his delivery of the Third State of the Territory address. Special thank you to Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach. Thank you to Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett for all you do on behalf of the people of the Virgin Islands nationally. Federal thank yous go out to all members of the 34th Legislature, all members of the Judiciary, Executive Branch Departments, all central staff employees, including the Office of the Executive Director, Security, Media, Transportation, Legal Counsel, the Custodial Services, Journal and the Maintenance Division, our federal partners, the staff of the Office of the Senate President, the men and women of the National Guard for their service, and of course, last but not least, the people of the United States Virgin Islands, those here and those listening and viewing abroad as well. Special thank you, of course, to the clergy. Please stand for the benediction by Bishop Damas Eloy,

2:24:10 from the Living Word Family Church Ministries. Called the State of the Territory Address. We thank you for attending, and we are delighted to be here you do the benediction for the hour our father who art in heaven hallowed be your name your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven thank you that every activity went well thank you for our governor mr brian who gave us the state of the territory address today lord we thank you thank you for all the plans and items mentioned will be guided and guided by you and your plans and purposes for these beautiful virgin islands

thank you lord now lord continue to keep your mighty precious carrying hands on all our leaders our governor lieutenant governor the president of our legislators the senators commissioners and all employees of the government of the united states virgin islands no lord bless also these territories keep us and protect us from harm danger accidents sudden death from floods and storms and fires in the name of the lord jesus now we thank you that everything that has been discussed will be fulfilled by your mighty power and guidance. Now the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord cause his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up the light of his continents upon you and give you peace. Peace in your hearts and peace in your home. Peace in your relationships. Peace in our community and thank God peace in our world. God bless you. Thank you you very much. Thank you Pastor Eloy. As we adjourn I ask that those of us those of you in the gallery to hold in your place until the members of the judiciary depart then you may follow. Thank you. The first session of the 34th

2:26:42 legislature is hereby adjourned. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

2:29:42 Thank you. [1 such phrases repeated 9 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

2:34:12 Thank you. I'm Africa Harrigan for Legit TV. joining us of course is jonelle alexis jackson today was a very eventful day earlier today members of the 34th legislature convened a legislative session to conclude organizing the body moments ago governor albert bryan jr delivered his third state of the territory address speech and now we're ushering into the senate reactions getting the senator's reactions to the governor's speech joining me is our senate president senator donna fred gregory how are you i'm well thank you what are your thoughts on the governor's speech i thought that the governor's speech this evening was a bit was a bit optimistic i thought it was of course lengthy but there was there was a lot of detail in his speech about a number of his priorities but what i think that is really most important here is the importance of the governor really working with the 34th legislature in order to implement much of what he indicated this evening again i noted that there was a lot of it seemed lofty but implementation and success is heavily dependent on the work that he does with the legislation of the virgin islands in march of 2020 the governor declared a state of

2:36:24 emergency for the territory then he eventually mandated the wearing of mask an hour to the dissemination of the vaccinations also known as operation ward speed on a rate from one to ten one being the lowest and high beat ten being the highest how would you rate the overall management of the COVID-19 pandemic in the territory um well of course that was not a part of the governor's speech as far as us rating it but I will tell you that he did provide about six or seven pages is on the work that he's done with the COVID-19. So I will give him a nine on that. Yes, I would rate him on a nine because a lot of effort went into it.

2:37:03 The Department of Health, the VITEMA Department, and a number of the other emergency personnel. They've done an excellent job in trying to secure us as it relates to the COVID-19 situation. And you continue to see that work around the COVID-19 is prevalent here in the territory. So I will give him a nine. One of the things that the governor mentioned in his speech was that the government of the Virgin Islands is delinquent in their payments, as well as WAPA is on the verge of collapsing and management is one of their biggest issues. What are your thoughts on that? Well, I don't know that he noted that the government is delinquent on its payments. I think he noticed specifically that over the years, the government has been delinquent in its payments.

2:37:49 But I strongly believe based on the appropriations that are provided by this body, that that should not, in fact, be the case. You are aware that there is a single-payer system. Now the situation with WAPA, he did acknowledge, finally, that there are issues with the management at WAPA, and we, of course, in the 33rd legislature, myself and several of my colleagues, we brought legislation around oversight of WAPA, and it sounds as if, based on his discussion this evening, that although he vetoed the bill, He's utilizing the information that was provided from our oversight bill to in fact work with WAPA and its board to address many of the deficiencies that are occurring in WAPA at this time.

2:38:35 Was there anything in his speech that you would have wanted him to mention tonight that he did not? Well, I think that for me, of course, you know that I'm big on education. And he did talk about the fact that in 2020, He was looking to reforming education, but we really didn't hear how. Of course, the pandemic hit, and I think that while the pandemic hit, the administrators of the Department of Education had time, in fact, to begin to really look at the K-3 issues that we have in the territory, vocational education. He did talk a lot about workforce development, but unless and until we truly address the issues we have with vocational education here in the territory i don't know how successful we'll be so education for me is a big issue and i really think that um is important for the 34th legislature to really keep an eye on education thank you janelle thank you so much africa i'm here tonight with vice president novelle e francis jr of the 34th legislature of the virgin islands how are you this evening i'm fine thank you how are you i'm well um as we all know we had a lengthy address by the governor this evening what are some of the key points or most notable points that jumped out at you through his throughout his address well first of all i want to thank the governor for presentation of the state of

the territory in 2021 is in fact his third state of the territory address and i must say that i i join in commending the administration and the covet task force for keeping us safe i believe that the tremendous amount of work that went into the heavy lifting that was required some very decisive action that was taken to make sure sure that we remain safe and contain the COVID virus. We saw that, you know, there was some tough decisions that needed to be made. They continue to be at the forefront in providing the public with the necessary information. The action that was taken at the airport and everything else, I believe, helped. And I truly believe in the Caribbean that we are part of one of the leaders in regards to the containment of the COVID pandemic that have plagued the rest of the nation. So I to commend the administration for that and certainly the governor's uh presentation this evening was somewhat optimistic um i may see it a little bit differently uh because of course i hear from the people on the ground and represent the people and there's a lot of complaint that comes in out to my office from time to time um but the governor um delivered uh optimistic uh speech uh very very verbose uh um you know it's a long speech but nonetheless i believe that he conveyed what he wanted to convey to the public um i think that what's critical for me is that um you know we hear about the funding and the economy uh continue to thrive and i think that that's critical um we're in such a good position that we're given 30 1300 checks out to um educators in the near future and where that's commendable i also very concerned about what happened to the nurses what happened to the police officers what happened to other government employees that really put themselves on the front line um you know during this whole situation so i'm hoping that he has additional checks to give out to those as well um you know i i believe that the governor also spoke to a number of initiatives that he intend to deploy in 2021 i'm looking forward to those because

2:41:55 i believe that 2021 from all accounts will be a good year um for us all so i believe that that certainly we're looking forward to that a little bit taken back that finally he came to reality with wapa situation we have been at the forefront um and really trying to hold wapa accountable for quite some time and i think tonight um it's finally hit him that in fact we have been complaining about the lack of accountability and management at wapper and the billing errors i think that they've come full circle that he's really committed to doing that i didn't hear enough in terms of what course of action he intend to deploy uh to make sure that that's corrected but nonetheless you know we'll continue to exhort our oversight to make sure that that happens excellent i do want to pivot just before our last question um you in this current term the 34th legislature you will serve as the chairman of health hospitals and human services can you tell me are there any key points of his address that spoke to you or things that you will be more vigilant about this coming term yes absolutely well one for sure i was happy to hear that jfl north that in fact we'll see the opening of jfl north in may we need to make sure that we adhere and satisfy um in fact that jfl north in may is up an operation i think the people of st croix deserve that um so certainly we'll be holding him steadfast to that um he also spoke about the situation with the behavioral health legislation that have been sent down for quite some time and yes that's one of the priority items that i will be moving in the 34th legislature but i'm surprised that the executive order didn't occur from before i don't believe that simply merging the fire department and ems will provide any additional service to the public and if that's the case then it could have been done a long time ago we have given the governor funding in terms of our mental health area um you know three million dollars for the build out of the anisope site two additional million dollars for mobile substation to deal with our mental health issues as well as our homelessness you know so i'm hoping that while we continue to wait for the executive order or for the merger that there'll be some action taken to make sure that we address this particular issue for me in particular i believe that once i leave the 34th legislature if it's

2:44:07 one thing i want to accomplish is to be able to get our mental health situation in order thank you so much for those words vice president francis i also want to thank you for taking time to interview with us this evening and we also look forward to your committee the committee on health hospitals and human services during this 34th legislative term thank you so much back to you africa thank you janelle joining me is senator genevieve how are you tonight good evening africa good evening to all good evening to all those listening and viewing uh thank you so much for this opportunity what stood out to you the most in the governor's speech uh what stood out to me most in the governor's speech were a number of highlights including his decision to merge waiko and the port authority um addressing the situation of our ports which is huge as we talk about economic development and certainly this is really looking at restructuring the infrastructure of government what also stood out um during his test his speech was his decision to submit to our body to the legislature, the 8%, the long overdue 8% issue.

2:45:16 And I certainly will support that measure when it comes before this body. One of the things that the governor mentioned was that the state of the territory, it was resurgent. What are your thoughts? There's a lot of optimism in the governor's speech tonight. Much of many beleaguering issues of concerns over our infrastructure, our roads, our schools. And as the chairwoman of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development, I'm keenly aware of a lot of the education issues. As he said in his testimony, he encouraged us to hit the ground running. And so myself and members of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development we have last week beginning school tours. And so my question

now, what I did not hear in the testimony was really more information about the plan to really rebuild many of our schools. Certainly we know the ones, a few that are slated to be rebuilt, but in school tours, Most of many of our schools are in a really bad condition. And so I would like to gain more information as I work along with the commission education and other education entities to rebuild our schools and also address the curriculum. Was there anything in his speech that you would have wanted him to speak about in addition to education?

2 : 46 : 26 Yes, he brought up the governor spoke about hotels. And one thing that I as a representative of the people of St. Croix, I wish to hear a lot more about economic development for St. Croix. When he spoke about the hotels for St. Croix, it was very general in nature. I would like a lot more specifics as we work to really, you know, build the economic industry on St. Croix. And so that's fair and balanced among the districts. And so I would have hoped to hear much more information about the projects slated for hotel development. And I look forward to working with the administration to get St. Croix also on board in terms of economic development. Thank you, Senator.

2 : 47 : 01 okay so um just one quick question let's just squeeze this in um the virgin islands police department he said is drastically you know it's understaffed but then there were 17 000 unemployment claims made to the department of labor what do you think is the disconnect between filling vacancies to those who are unemployed well education is really and workforce development is really the key to addressing employment and unemployment and we have to really look at the issue of crime reduction by really working on making sure that our children leave school with skills and that's something i'm very committed to for those who are aware i have actually i serve on the virgin york's board of corrected education and we're working hard to address that so uh seemingly as we work on investing and work on in addressing our economic infrastructure as we begin to push and make sure people leave school with skills we're going to continue to push down on crime and we're going to team to build our economy the same way thank you very much senator back to you joe no thank you africa i'm here with senator duane m de graff how are you this evening senator fine thank you and happy new year to you happy new year to you as well as the audience may or may not know senator de graff is a member of the non-majority and was also a previous member of the non-majority in the 33rd legislature.

2 : 48 : 33 What are some of the key takeaways or key points throughout the governor's address that you felt spoke to you? Well, first of all, I'd like to say condolences to the individuals who, families who lost their lives from COVID and thank you to the public and private sector of honorable persons who came out and first responders who showed to keep this community going. The first lady said, I think the governor was optimistic. He made it really, to me, sound so peaches and cream. Everything was fine. We have money. You know, we have everything going. I know a lot of the things he spoke of were passed in this legislature between the 32nd and 34th, up to 33rd legislature. So he's optimistic, and I applaud the things that he's doing with COVID. I would give him an A. There's still some issues before he could get an A+, but in COVID leadership, I give him an A on that. So those are some of the things I took away from him.

2 : 49 : 39 Were there any aspects of his address that you did not agree with or you differed from? Well, not to say disagree with or differ. I would like to see something done with Charlotte Kimmelman to get that going again. I would like to see something done with our trash situation and how terrible the islands are, you know, need to clean up still. Crime is still an issue. We can't go past, but I do agree 100% to what he put out in regards to the crime, making the people of the territory more responsible to assist just law enforcement with crime issues and put the criminals on point that, hey, we all are watching now. We're going to be more involved. Noting your background in law enforcement and public safety, what are some things that you feel could be a little bit more, the governor and his administration and his cabinet could be a bit more vigilant as it relates to the territory's public safety?

2 : 50 : 34 Well, based on what the governor said, he said it in a nutshell. We have to get a community involvement. How we go about doing it, we have to go out and build trust again. We see some of the issues involving police officers, involving crime, drugs. We got to get past the situation. A little people know this is not the Virgin Island Police Department, the mandates of the department. Just some individuals who choose to do wrong, and they'll pay their price regardless of one way. But the people of the Virgin Island need to know that, hey, we still support the police department and what it stands for, to serve and protect. Agreed. I do want to pivot to one last question. Pivoting back to the COVID-19 pandemic itself, how do you feel about the onset of pre-existing conditions and conditions that may appear as a result of COVID-19? In the matter of those things, how do you feel like we have been doing in the vaccine distribution and things of that nature like again it's being that this is a pandemic of biblical proportions the things that the Virgin Islands have done the governor's administration and the things that we've taken part in doing has led and I do agree in terms of our numbers are down in terms of deaths we to hear that we generated so much money in the last fiscal year uh you know i want to make sure that you don't paint that grim picture to grs because again we have legislation that was passed and i may have been straight but legislation that was passed let me get it out on the record uh at 8383 for any additional revenues generated a portion of that 50 should go to the grs so let's not look at one way and don't say the other there is existing legislation to

put money into GRS or system. And again, back to COVID, I think it did an A of a job, A plus, with fine-tuning some of the issues that we have. Thank you for those sentiments, Senator DeGraff. I want to thank you for taking the time to speak to us here at Legit TV. You're most welcome.

- 2:52:45 Thank you very much. You're welcome. Back to you, Africa. Thank you, Janelle. Joining me is Senator Milton Potter. How are you tonight? Excellent. How are you doing? I'm doing pretty good. So what are your thoughts on the governor's speech? Well, I think the governor really, as far as state of the territory speeches go, he gave a pretty optimistic speech, very positive, highlighting most of his perceived accomplishments of his administration. So it was very optimistic, it was very positive, and that is what you expect in these types of speeches. One of the things that he mentioned was that the COVID-19 pandemic, he would say that it's resurgent as far as the state of the territory. Do you agree with that?
- 2:53:38 That the state of the territory is resurgent? Yes. I would say that, yes, yes. I mean, meaning that we are in a process of making some gains. with respect to coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic. I think the governor did a reasonable job of managing the COVID-19, which is a brand new pandemic that we were not familiar with, persons across the globe. And relatively speaking, the governor and his COVID-19 task force, I think, did a reasonably effective job of managing the process. Things could have been far worse.
- 2:54:25 So I think it put us in a situation where we can build, hopefully, from some of the negative effects of COVID-19. The fact that we were able to come through relatively unscathed, I mean, I think it put us in a position to begin to rebuild our economy, to focus on bringing our kids back to the classroom from the virtual learning process. So I think we are poised, I think, to make some substantial gains as we move forward. The governor spoke very lightly on the GERS topic, and I know that's something that you're really passionate about. What are your thoughts on that?
- 2:55:24 Well, you know, the big elephant in the room is the GERS. I was waiting to hear about the GERS early on in the governor's speech. And as the pages went by, I was wondering when that was going to come. I know he had to talk about it. He mentioned the special purpose vehicle initiative that he put forward a number of times that was not successful in this body and that he would continue to move forward with proposing initiatives, but that it is this body that he is going to rely upon to make some major monetary initiatives to help rescue the GRS. What I think we need to do as a body, I think that we must, at this point, given the urgency of the situation, we must come together, meaning to pull together a GRS Solutions Summit, not to be confused with a task force, but a Solutions Summit, The goal of which, and I think we ought to do that in the month of February, the goal of which would be to develop meaningful, specific, implementable solutions to at least buy five years of life from the system while we focus on a more long-term solution. solution. I think our retirees have been dealing with COVID-19 and anxiety of that and now they are dealing with some significant anxieties with regards to the possible collapse of the system. So I think a solution summit initiated by this body bringing in the GRS, bringing in the actuaries, bringing in GRS consultants, the governor, his key fiscal persons to sit at the table to identify let's open the books let's see where we can reshift money let's see where we can leverage federal dollars to offset some of the costs of identifying a meaningful um meaningful revenues to buy at least five years of life right now for the system I think that would be a good starting point to begin to, like I said, alleviate the anxiety of our retirees and begin to identify some meaningful and transparent way forward to rectify our issues with the GRS.
- 2:57:55 Was there anything in his speech that he did not discuss that you would have liked him to? I would have liked the governor to talk a little more with a little more specificity regarding education, in specific, the learning loss that our children have been experiencing as a result of, first of all, the hurricanes, Alma Maria, back-to-back learning loss there, deteriorating infrastructure, keeping kids out of the classroom. Then comes COVID-19, significant learning loss adjusting to the virtual learning process. I think that in order for us to make up for that gap, bridge that learning deficit, which we will be paying for, we will see the manifestations of that in short order, a year or two down the line, the Department of Education ought to come to us with a specific strategy for remediating those learning gaps. Maybe a tutorial, a massive tutorial initiative. You know, we can't just let it go. You know, we have to make up for the loss of learning that our children have been suffering from, have been experiencing for the last several years.
- 2:59:16 Thank you, Senator. Back to you, Janelle. Thank you, Africa. I'm here with Majority Leader Senator Marvin A. Blyton. How are you doing this evening, Senator? I'm good. I'm good. Good evening. How are you doing? I am well, thank you. The governor did share a rather positive outlook around surrounding the issues that plague our territory as it relates to the housing crisis. What is your take on the governor's address this evening? Well, first of all, I believe I will address his speech was basically upbeat. I'm very optimistic. He spoke a lot about the COVID-19 pandemic and all they have been doing to keep us safe in the territory. I think they have done a pretty good job when it comes to that. In reference to the speech and some of what I would like to hear most, more from is, for instance, like the situation we have with our housing crisis here in the territory. And I know you touched on several projects that are about to come on board, but nonetheless, the Envision program and all that's happening in that space, I would like to hear a little bit more in terms of

what they are doing to address that situation. When it comes to our utility and WAPA, he spoke also about that and he admitted exactly in terms of the management. But when it comes to WAPA and many of our citizens here in the territory, what's going on in that space with many parents that have lost their job, depending on unemployment, the unemployment benefits have stopped. But yet still, the kids are in school and need to learn.

3:00:45 But yet, guess what? They have no power. So what do we do in that space and I would like to see what we can do when it comes to being creative with COVID funds in terms of assisting those individuals and or having some type of assistance in terms of a package to assist with the utility bills. I would like to hear a little bit more about that. In terms of the RIT Park and what they're doing because the banks are not basically giving loans out to companies, I'm happy to see what they're doing in terms of the gap financing to assist in that area. I'm very happy to hear that. Also, what I'm very happy to hear is what they're doing with the marine industry in that space. I mean, that industry that we should have tapped into years ago, and I'm glad that they're finally tapping into that area in terms of assisting many, many regional landers when it comes to investment, when it comes to jobs, and when it comes to the whole industry. I'm happy to hear that they're actually going into that space because that's new revenues and new monies coming into our territory despite all of the challenges we are facing. And that's an industry that's right now on the uptick when it comes to investment, over \$100 billion in the marine industry right now throughout the world. So I'm happy to hear that.

3:01:56 I agree with your sentiments and also that the general community and the Virgin Islanders here at home as well share your sentiments and also have mixed opinions about the marine industry as well. I hope that we can continue to see more from your committee, housing, infrastructure, and telecommunications. One thing I'd like to add, exactly, when it comes to telecommunications, I would have liked to hear something about that because, as you know, we have many challenges with that area when it comes to the merger with Liberty and AT&T, when it comes to folks not being able to have connectivity, calls being dropped over and over and over again. would like to hear anything when it comes to that area but nonetheless we will dive into that as we move forward in the 34th legislature i look forward to seeing more updates from your committee as well and also on our segments through the chair back to you africa thank you janelle joining me is senator alma francis hilegger how are you tonight hi good evening good evening so what are your thoughts on the governor's speech I was it was very optimistic. I was looking forward to quite a bit of what he had to say and some of the things that he did share this evening were of a positive nature. There were certain things I was looking forward to. I didn't really hear disgust in depth but overall what he did share was very upbeat and optimistic. So what are some of the things that you have would have liked them to discuss tonight well he spoke a little bit about tourism and the starting of some of the programs that are going to be coming online i think for me during this pandemic it would have been important like we saw so many of our other caribbean counterparts really while during the lockdown was really marketing and pushing their destinations so that when they do come online they're already part of people's thought process and ideas and minds in order to get the job done. Now in terms of education, I know that that's one of the topics that you really

3:04:04 champion. Was there anything that he spoke about tonight that really stood out to you in terms of education? Well, I was very happy to hear when he spoke about the renovation of Gladys Abraham where the Wheatley Center, Skill Center, is going to be relocated to. I think a lot of times for me, vocational programs and the CTE programs are very important when it comes to the abilities and the learning skills of individuals in our territory. And as a committee member on education this past week, we toured some of the schools and we were able to really see all of the CTE programs that are online. I mean, from cosmetology to construction, all these different things. So between the school age children and the adults who are going to be utilizing Wheatley Center, I was very happy to hear. My biggest concern with that as a senator to make sure that the necessary funding goes to these types of programs because you have a lot of teachers that are enthused in teaching our populace whether children and adults about a trade but we have to make sure through the grants that we do receive that those fundings get to them in order to get the materials to utilize to teach our community thank you so much senator Back to you, Jono.

3:05:22 Thank you so much, Africa. I'm here with Senator Stephen D. Payne. How are you this evening, Senator? I'm doing excellent. What about yourself? Happy New Year. Happy New Year. Thank you. I'm doing well, as can be, in the midst of a pandemic. But just to pivot a bit, you are the chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security, Justice, and Public Safety. Yes, my dear. Based on the governor's address this evening, what are some of the most notable aspects that he mentioned under that committee or in general that piqued your interest okay there were several areas that piqued my interest but uh relative to homeland security or or crime i must commend a men and women of the residence police department and the job they've been doing in getting guns out of the street they've been doing a yeoman's job especially being that they have limited resources and limited manpower but the governor made a statement his state of territory that we've been echoing since the first time that the commission has come onto the scene we need a comprehensive a comprehensive strategic plan to address violent crime according to the governor simply arresting persons after they commit a crime doesn't do anything to reduce crime gun violence is plaguing our community st thomas st john and st

croix but more so a tranquil place such as st john that was so peaceful now is experiencing armed home invasions um armed robberies daylight shootings uh murders on an island that is relatively peaceful so i'm truly hoping that going forward we can sit down with the police department and come up with a comprehensive strategic plan that the governor himself spoke about we cannot address crime unless we have a comprehensive plan to address it um and a spinoff of that i heard my colleague speaking about the covet situation commissioner in canada and dr seems have been doing an outstanding job getting information out to the community since the inception of covid i have personally seen them and seeing john st thomas and st croix setting up workstations um in the shopping areas so the persons can come and get tested as information changes from the cdc they make sure that the information gets out to the community they have been carrying sound trucks to the different neighborhoods to ensure that the message gets out because they want to see the community safe i must commend the

3:07:48 department of health you are doing an outstanding job i came in from florida a few weeks ago and when i got to the airport the soldiers of the national guard had a system after this world lineup they checked every passenger coming off the plane those who needed to go in line for testing those who had the results those who needed to go but wherever they had a system in place that colonel knoxley marker you have to commend your soldier they've been doing an outstanding job on behalf of the people of the territory and i share those sentiments as well i want to thank you for taking this time to interview here with us at legit tv senator payne and we look forward to seeing more progress from your committee on homeland security justice and public safety thank you very much god bless thank you back to you thank you janelle joining me is senator carla joseph how are you tonight i am wonderful and i'm very thankful miss african how are you doing tonight i'm doing really good how what are your thoughts on the governor's speech i really thought the governor was very upbeat, animated, and he really did well in his delivery of his third state of the territory response. I'm very glad to be here. This is my first time hearing and sitting in the well as a senator, a newly elected senator, to hear the state of the territory addressed by our governor. So far, we have 17,000 unemployment claims at the Department of Labor, and I know workforce development is one of your biggest topics what are your thoughts i think we have a long road ahead we definitely need to try our best to get as much people to work in the recovery of the virgin islands and rebuilding better and stronger it should be all hands on deck so having the training opportunities available to our people and to also transition other workers

3:09:45 into new careers pathway should be something that we should be pushing hard for uh in this administration i think that's one of the key we have a high unemployment rate still it's about 8.8 compared to the national level which is about 6.2 and then we haven't even touched on the number of persons who are no longer collecting unemployment which is huge because we have all of the hotels that are most some of the hotels not all some of the hotels are still not fully operational sugar bay is not fully operational um marriott is not fully operational cameo bay those are huge hotels and they're still not fully operational so we have a lot of unemployed people who may not be collecting unemployment checks but they are still unemployed so that's what we have to really look at those who are not counted in that number one of the topics that the governor spoke about was wapa how they have a major management issue what are your thoughts on that i really appreciate that the governor is really taking into consideration and being accountable because wapa does fall under his executive branch even though it's a semi-autonomous as the chairperson for the government operations and consumer affairs i'm really interested in seeing how we can work with them and work together to really transform WAPA into being more responsible, more reliable, and also offering alternative energy sources because we can't continue to just rely on fossil fuel. We need to raise the bar higher for our sustainability here in the Virgin Islands. Was there anything in particular that the governor did not speak about tonight in his

3:11:31 speech that you would have wanted him to yes i for me he didn't speak about our aging population nothing i didn't hear anything at what we're going to be doing to assure that our aging population is taken care of we know we have queen louise home that is derelict uh and and needs help there but we don't have a system in place that i saw in his speech talking about how we're going to be dealing with the elders in our community those who are in need of elderly care home health care those type of care in the health field i didn't see or hear anything touching on those i know we have seaview nursing facility that is damaged from the hurricanes and we should be able to do something to provide really good quality health care for our seniors so that they can be serviced and receive the proper health care service with dignity. Thank you so much, Senator.

3:12:41 Yes. So in terms of the aging population, what are some of the solutions you would like to bring to the table for the aging population what i'm really looking at is adult daycare that's something i campaign hard on i've already started to work and had conversation with a ngo here also look at uh seaview nursing home can so we can form a public private partnership and to provide those type of services rehabilitation services physical rehabilitation services for our elderly people those are some critical areas for that aging population that is growing every day and are in dire need of really quality health care thank you so much senator back to you joe now thank you africa i'm here with freshman senator samuel carillon how

are you this evening sir good good doing very well this is your first state of the territory address officially as a senator what was your overall takeaway from this this evening's speech well uh i think the governor was very his speech was very hopeful um but i still think there's a lot that we have to still do and overcome especially the whole pandemic and the whole recovery process so there's a lot of work to be done understood you are currently the chairman of the committee on youth sports and recreation based on his speech this evening what are some key things that you're looking for our expectations for your committee and the overall outlook for youth sports and recreation in our territory well i was pleased to hear it with regards to some of the parks that we have in st thomas and also in st croix i was pleased to hear the governor speak about their completion this year um also the mason pool over on on st croix so i'm really hopeful to seeing some of these projects that are through the office of disaster recovery there in that process are rebuilding um so i'm looking forward to seeing them accomplish and even finish

3:14:44 excellent as it relates to the rest of the speech he mentioned on a very a variety of topics as it relates to the pandemic uh ems vipd crime public safety etc but he did mention a lot of issues related to our energy crisis as well do you have an outlook or take on that or optimism as it relates to our outlook here in the territory well i was i was glad to hear the governor speak about the inefficiency in the management of of wapa and how it's important for wapa to be accountable he spoke about the uh the billing system and how it has created so many problems and over the years and they still haven't gotten it tweaked out so you know i'm i was glad to hear that i'm looking forward to seeing uh wampa restructured and seeing some of those four new generators implemented so so that the community can receive the relief. It's been very hard on our business owners, on our senior population, having to pay outrageous bills. So I'm really looking forward to seeing those changes implemented.

3:15:48 Agreed, Senator. I wanna thank you for taking the opportunity to interview with us this evening, and we look forward to more of your progress in the 34th legislature. Thank you, and thank you for having me. Thank you. Back to you, Africa. Thank you, Janelle. Joining me is Senator Crook, VLA. How are you tonight? I'm good. How are you doing? I'm doing pretty good. So what are your thoughts on the governor's speech? Well, definitely his speech was upbeat. He tried to provide a positive light in terms of the path of the Virgin Islands moving forward. He did cover a number of areas that he think that we're progressing. I think that one thing that he forgot to mention is that a lot of the areas that he spoke to in reference to progress, whether it was the Henry Rolson Airport or the storage terminal or the Hotel Development Act or tax increment financing, they were all measures that were passed by this body. And I don't think that he gave enough credit to the body overall in reference to passing those particular measures. I think he needed to concentrate on that a bit more. He spoke about the securitization and the savings that would have gone to GRS, but he did not touch the savings. So he spoke about some 400 million in savings, which would have resulted in only 60 million dollars. I would have liked to seen a bit more of a focus on public safety. He spoke about it, but in terms of vague terms, we had some arrests, but not no concrete areas in the path moving forward. I've been an advocate for making sure that we have GPS on all the cars. I've been an advocate for the installation of cameras we have some two million dollars that have been sitting there one million for over two or three years that have been sitting there i think that that is one way that we could definitely reduce crying speaking more in reference to education about the rollout and the status of schools and getting those schools ready to to be able to accept children the president have definitely come out to the platform where he wants um k-8 students to go back to school and and he had been advocating that he wants it to happen in the next few months. So we need to begin to develop those mechanisms as to how we're going to be able to move and how we're going to be moving in line to get the Virgin Islands back in step.

3:18:06 In terms of moving in line, what are your thoughts on our overall management of the COVID-19 pandemic in the territory? With the COVID-19, I think we have done a relatively good job in terms of being able to stop the surge. We had a couple surge where we've been able to control it. I think that Virgin Islanders are doing a good job with the masks going into businesses. I think we still have some work. I think that they have finally corrected the mistakes that they were making at the airports. We now have a better protocol in place. I just want to make sure that we're going to be ready for the reopening of the economy another tourism product we should be rebranding the virgin islands now we need to make sure that the main street project is completed we need to make sure that we're able to market the virgin islands similar to what a lot of the other caribbean islands are doing they're doing a totally different marketing plan i think that this is an opportunity for us to have some diversity i have been advocating for us to go After businesses, we have clearly seen that there's an effort for Made in the USA. The president just signed an executive order for Made in the USA, I think, yesterday. And we saw the issues of not having sufficient vaccination, PPEs, et cetera. So, you know, I've been saying that we need to spend some money to see whether or not we could have some of those companies relocate to the Virgin Islands and be able to enjoy the tax breaks that we have in the Virgin Islands and also enjoy the Jones Act and the fact that that product will be made in the Virgin Islands. owners. I think that this is a time now for us to aggressively market the benefits of the Virgin Islands of the offer. Is there anything in particular in the governor's speech that he didn't

mention that you would have liked him to mention tonight? He covered a number of areas. We didn't have a thorough assessment in reference to park and recreation, the status of all the facilities. He did cover the Pali Joseph Stadium. I think that his language that he spoke in reference to horse racing, I think it was erroneous. He did say that to the bullion, et cetera, but I think that definitely government houses have held

3:20:14 back on the racetrack and St. Croix being open. VIGL has made an offer to invest in the St. Croix racetrack and the offer has literally been not dealt with. So I was surprised at the language that was used today, the language in reference to the conversation that is taking place to horse racing. And I think that the government need to be honest in his approach to what is taking place with horse racing and it is clear that um he's embedded with with southland gaming and is not able to make the necessary decisions to move horse racing forward in the virgin islands thank you senator back to you jonelle thank you so much thank you africa i'm here with senator janelle casearo how are you this evening senator i am blessed i know you took a lot away from the governor's address this evening but um what are some of the key points that jumped out at you and And also, what are some of the most impactful points that you feel like he missed or gently touched on?

3:21:09 Well, I want to first commend the governor for his work done. Can you hear me? I want to commend the governor for his work done on the pandemic. I'm not here to be an obstructionist or to bash the work that he has done. So his team has really done a very good job in containing and preventing deaths and overwhelming our health care infrastructure. What stuck out of me, let's do education, for example. The only progress or the only litmus test to education cannot be the rebuilding of new schools.

3:21:43 The data was also incorrect, a fact check. When we talk about graduation rates improving, we literally cut school off March 20th. We declared a new grading policy where no child could fail. The fourth marking period became credit recovery, which is summer school technically, and our graduation rate went to 100%. So when you look at the data, look at the contributing factors. I was looking for the governor to talk about literacy. How did we move our students from point A to point B? We had those students had the 2017 hurricanes. And then in two years came a pandemic. What is the status of education? We're talking about Lime Tree Bay. What are we doing about the environment?

3:22:27 Clean energy, renewable energy. so there were so many things that that stuck out to me that he could have expounded on but about 85 percent of his speech was based on his response to the pandemic and we we typically hear his response in the weekly press briefings that he does have so I expected more in those areas workforce development where are we on that what the unemployment rate continues to increase how do connected that from high school to college how do we prepare um the workforce affordable housing we didn't discuss affordable housing uh when people aren't when people don't own a piece of the rock or they can rent or buy then you're gonna have a brain drain because that that population becomes very transient so we didn't talk about affordable housing we didn't talk about the envision program the recovery program and there were timelines missing in the recovery everything was soon this road will be built soon that will be done soon when you know so some of the things i saw but um overall i think i think the speech was good and the pandemic but it lacked substance and meat in the other pertinent areas thank you for that you are this term in the 34th legislature the chairwoman on the committee on of disaster recovery and infrastructure infrastructure can Can you tell me a little bit about your goals or plans for that committee?

3:23:59 Well, we need to figure out the true status of the funds. A lot of the things that the governor discussed tonight, had it not been for federal dollars, wouldn't be a vision or anything. So we have \$8 billion the federal government sent to us. What are we doing with those funds? What's the status of it? How much money have we drawn down? Who are our contractors? Who are our subcontractors? Why haven't they been paid? So the intent is to really dive down deeper beyond the surface level as to the status of the recovery and then a pandemic is a disaster as well so we need to know like departments like education when you receive recently about 68 million more dollars and you've only spent it on personnel what are you doing why haven't we procured the cleaning contracts the plexiglass so the intent of the committee is to look at the recovery process and if we need to craft legislation to improve the recovery process then we shall but it's more of an investigative committee um and people know me to be a stickler and to really do thorough research so um literally the the federal government has been extremely generous to this territory and if we cannot move our projects the federal government will begin to de-obligate funds so if we are to improve the quality of life we have to get our recovery on the move very very strong sentiment senator um i do want to before i conclude relate to the public as well senator soro in her committee has a meeting on thursday february 4th that will be held at the earl b ottley legislative chambers on saint thomas so i want to thank you yes absolutely as the intent of the first hearing is to to discuss the health care infrastructure so we have um wang louie in the morning and then we have royce in the afternoon we brought in um with o'brien um ecom optim all the the subcontractors to see the status of our health care infrastructure on the 23rd will continue with the department of health and the dhs and then move to vihfa as it pertains to wapa and the hud funding

thank you for that senator i know you well i know i and many of the other uh residents here at home will be tuning into that meeting on thursday february 4th at 9 a.m thank you so much

3 : 26 : 14 you're welcome back to you africa thank you janelle joining me is senator franklin johnson how are you good evening i'm doing fine so what are your thoughts on the governor's speech i you know it was a a little flip-flop for me but i i think he did very good when he spoke about covid i think his administration have been doing a pretty good job with the covid pandemic and the way how to be you know informing people and try to keep the community abreast as to what's going on with the covid so i'll give him a little plus with that. One of the words that he used to describe this overall state of the territory was resurgent. Do you agree with that? One of the words that he used to describe the overall progress of the state of the territory is resurgent. Do you agree with that? Not fully.

3 : 26 : 59 I feel that there's a lot of projects that left dormant, have not been moving, and I think we had a perfect opportunity to capitalize and rebuild in our infrastructure in many ways with a lot of the federal funding that came into us. If you look at the roofing program, for instance, he spoke about that in the state of the territory, and he spoke about going from \$60 million to \$140 million. But in the last year's state of the territory, he spoke from going from \$60 million to \$250 million. But as I fly into St. Thomas and I fly back to St. Croix, I see so many blue roofs that's still on top of people home. Our families, our loved ones are still living in this element. He did not speak enough on that for me. He did not speak about the funding that we have not been drawing down to pay contractors. There's a lot of contractors that are owed from doing different programs. Some of them is an arder roof program. And if we continue failing to make sure we draw this money down, hurricane season is around the corner, and our loved ones will be still living with blue tops on their homes.

3 : 28 : 00 So I was very disappointed in the little bit that he spoke about that particular project. Was there anything in particular that you would have wanted him to address that he did not address in his speech tonight? Well, for me, he did address everything, but he didn't address it in a manner in which I would like to hear. He spoke about the Polly Joseph Stadium. That, too, I have a problem. That project is stale. It's stale in the ground. We talk about giving an extra \$3 million to the Polly Joseph project. I am fully behind on that project, but we must have some accountability. the amount of money that have been spent in that project and it's still in the ground before we spend our next dollar. Someone needs to come sit and explain to us where all the money that we have spent in this project have gone thus far. Thank you so much, Senator, for joining us tonight.

3 : 28 : 54 Okay. Thank you so much for that, Africa. Thank you, Janelle. Yes, it has been. It's been really great very productive day today i agree uh for all the viewers at home before we do close out please stay tuned to the 34th legislature of the virgin islands and you can keep up with all of their doings and their legislative processes at legvi.org you can also find us on facebook and instagram at legislature usvi and you can also find us on twitter at the same handle legislature usvi from all of us here in the division of public affairs and legit tv and the legislature of the virgin islands thank you for tuning in and have a blessed evening thank you Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I'll see you next time.

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.

4x	Senator Dwayne DeGraff heard in this transcript as: DeGraff, Dwayne M. DeGraff
4x	Senator Kenneth L. Gittens heard in this transcript as: Kenneth L. Gittins
4x	Senator Kurt VLA heard in this transcript as: Kurt A. VLA, VLA
4x	Senator Marvin Blyden heard in this transcript as: Marvin A. Blyden, Marvin A. Blyton
4x	Senator Milton E. Potter heard in this transcript as: Milton Potter
4x	Senator Steven D. Payne Sr. heard in this transcript as: Stephen D. Payne, Steven D. Payne Sr
4x	Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach

- 3x **Governor Albert Bryan Jr**
- 3x **Senator Alma Francis-Heyliger**
heard in this transcript as: Alma Francis Heiliger
- 3x **Senator Carla Joseph**
- 3x **Senator Franklin D. Johnson**
- 3x **Senator Genevieve R. Whitaker**
heard in this transcript as: Genevieve Whitaker, Genevieve Whittaker
- 3x **Senator Janelle K. Saro**
heard in this transcript as: Janelle K. Saru
- 3x **Senator Javan James**
heard in this transcript as: Javon E. James Sr, Javon E. James Sr.
- 3x **Senator Novelle Francis**
heard in this transcript as: Novell E. Francis Jr
- 3x **Senator Samuel Carrion**
- 2x **Senator Donna A. Frett-Gregory**
heard in this transcript as: Donna A. Fred Gregory
- 1x **Senator Donna Frett-Gregory**
heard in this transcript as: Donna A. Frett-Gregory