

## **Answers to Members From Governor Albert Bryan Jr.**

### **Question from Representative Sablan:**

1. Interior's Office of Insular Affairs awards annual Energizing Insular Communities program grants to the territories to fund energy strategies that reduce the cost of electricity and reduce dependence on foreign fuels. Have the EIC program and funding grants helped the Virgin Islands of the U.S. lower electricity costs and reduce reliance on fossil fuels?

### **Answer:**

Then USDOJ has been instrumental in supporting projects that reduce the cost of electricity and reduce dependence on foreign fuels. Currently the Virgin Islands Energy Office is administering three different EIC grants that all address the various needs to reduce the price of paradise. Those programs include:

1. St. Croix Emergency Hurricane Shelter Micro-Grid - \$625,000
  - The micro-grid will enable the emergency shelter to function reliably during extended grid outages and significantly reduce the use of fossil fuel generators that have proven difficult to maintain and costly to fuel especially during an energy emergency.
2. Distributed Generation Market Structure - \$200,000
  - This grant supports the development of innovative strategies intended to manage current and future distributed energy resources throughout the territory.
3. Energy-Efficiency Benchmarking - \$310,000
  - This grant funding will ensure USVI has the capacity to maximize the impact of limited public funds by providing up to date energy efficiency analysis and benchmarking.

### **Question from Representative Cohen:**

Given the compact size of the US Virgin Islands, I understand your frustration with the Army Corps of Engineers and other agencies' concerns about any project's proximity to water. How would you balance concern for environmental protections with the needs of the Virgin Islands to modernize infrastructure or to rebuild after hurricanes?

### **Answer:**

The U.S. Virgin Islands is in a unique position as we recover and rebuild from the hurricanes of 2017. This unique position extends to our geographic location in the Caribbean. All major developments have an impact on the environment. With the combination of mitigation and infrastructure projects that will finally be funded, we can rebuild with resiliency, hardening and sustainability at the forefront while improving and modernizing our transportation infrastructure. The Departments of Public Works (DPW) and Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR) have

been working together to review our projects, particularly those in coastal zones, to ensure these projects are addressing current environmental concerns and are being built to accommodate future development in these areas.

DPNR requires that all recovery projects go through a federal consistency review process to ensure compliance with Clean Air, Clean Water, Historic Preservation and NEPA regulations. We, the local government, must be given the opportunity to work with our federal counterparts to continue rebuilding and improving our infrastructure while addressing the environmental issues that will keep our island homes pristine.

Our team, led by the Departments of Public Works and Planning and Natural Resources, are performing comprehensive reviews of large projects to ensure the delicate balance is inherent in all capital projects, especially our infrastructure projects.

### **Question(s) from Representative Tlaib**

1. Governor Bryan, how has climate change impacted your ability to build and maintain infrastructure?

a. How will the \$600 billion in clean energy funding in the Build Back Better plan help the U.S. Virgin Islands become more resilient in the face of climate change?

1b. What more is needed to fight the effects of climate change on your Islands?

### **Answer 1a:**

The US Virgin Islands stands to benefit substantially from many aspects of the Build Back Better plan. This is not surprising based on the reality that the USVI is directly exposed to the negative impacts of climate change. The following topics highlight the potential positive impact of leveraging Clean Energy Funds to bolster many ongoing energy efforts locally.

- **Energy Sector** – Climate Change has already pushed the Virgin Islands energy industry to the brink as we still find our community recovering from the 2017 Hurricane season while simultaneously preparing for the potential of destructive forces annually. The clean energy funding offers a number of opportunities for the USVI to become more resilient from the inevitable reality of the annual hurricane season. Building Back Better takes on new meaning within vulnerable communities such as the USVI. Continued efforts to modernize the electricity sector through increased renewable energy penetration & micro-grids, integration of robust Transmission & Distribution infrastructure, and sustainably expanding distributed and localized energy resources. The aforementioned topic areas represent ongoing efforts that the clean energy funding within the Build Back Better plan can further bolster.
- **Transportation** – The Government of the Virgin Islands (GVI) is preparing to launch a GO FLEET Initiative which will initiate the long road to electrifying on

transportation within the Virgin Islands starting with the GVI Fleet. Transportation electrification is critical to the USVI for a number of different reasons to include emissions reduction, energy independence, and mobility reliability. The ultimate success of this initiative will require substantial investment in EV inventory accessibility and EV charging infrastructure throughout the territory. The Build Back Better plan directly supports areas of ongoing focus for the GVI and we look forward to leveraging any available resources to become a benchmark for transportation electrification in remote and vulnerable communities.

- **Air Pollution Mitigation** – While the Virgin Islands occupies a small geographical footprint, there are number of significant industrial processes and large-scale marine activity that contribute disproportionately to the air pollution concentrations throughout the territory.

**Answer 1b:**

The USVI's economy depends on the continuity of these types of operations. As a result, being able to balance the positive impacts to the economy and negative impacts on the environment is paramount. The funding resources within the Build Back Better plan and future plans can assist greatly relative to striking this balance through Air Pollution mitigation.