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Premier Wheatley Reaffirms Commitment to Good Governance, Sustainability, and Democratic Advancement in the 2026 Budget Address

Release Date: 10 November, 2025



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Premier and Minister of Finance, Honourable Dr. Natalio D. Wheatley, reaffirmed his government's commitment to good governance, democratic advancement, and sustainable national growth, as he presented his 2026 Budget Address in the House of Assembly on Thursday 6 November 2025.

Under the theme, "Pillars of Progress: Building a Sustainable Nation", he highlighted historic achievements, underscoring the Virgin Islands' resilience and readiness for an advanced stage of self-governance.

Preserving Democracy and Advancing Governance Reform

Premier Wheatley reflected on the Territory's journey since the 2022 Commission of Inquiry and commended the people of the Virgin Islands for their resolve in protecting democratic values and constitutional order. He said: "When faced with the most serious test to our democracy in decades, we chose to move forward...to protect our democratic progress, to demonstrate...that the people of these Virgin Islands will always defend their constitutional integrity."

The Premier noted that the Government's implementation of the Commission of Inquiry (COI) recommendations was "a historic moment that will be remembered for saving the democracy that Faulkner, Fonseca, and De Castro, along with the 1,500 who marched, fought to preserve. It is fitting that we celebrate the 75th anniversary of representative government in the same year that the Order in Council threatening our Constitution was revoked. This is destiny aligning with the aspirations of our people."

Modernising Government and Strengthening Institutions

Through the Governance Reform Transition Plan, the Government continues to improve accountability, transparency, and public service delivery. Key initiatives include the establishment of the Human Rights Commission and a 911 dispatch system, modernisation of youth justice and immigration policies, and consultations on the Sexual Offences Bill.

Premier Wheatley also announced that in 2026, a Statutory Board Administrator will be appointed to strengthen oversight, improve reporting, and enforce compliance across public bodies. "We are overhauling the machinery of government to make it more efficient, more responsive, and more transparent. We are bringing in international governance experts to help us fix the systemic issues that have held us back for too long."

He announced reforms in electoral administration, data protection, and digital governance, with an Information Commissioner to be appointed to enforce the Data Protection Act, 2021, and protect citizens' privacy.

Tourism: Growth, Modernisation, and New Investment

Premier Wheatley, who is also Minister of Tourism, Culture, and Sustainable Development, reported that 2024 saw over 1.1 million visitors to the Territory, the second highest number to date, with projections of 1.12 million arrivals by year-end.

“Tourism is not just recovering, it is thriving,” he stated. “Visitor arrivals are up across every category, cruise and day-trippers are at record highs, and overnight visitors are returning in greater numbers than at any time since the disasters of 2017.”

Management of the tourism portfolio has now been fully transferred to the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Sustainable Development, enabling more coordinated policy and infrastructure development. The National Tourism Policy (2025–2035) is complete and under Cabinet review, with a National Tourism Plan to follow. Both strategies will guide the sector’s sustainable growth over the next decade.

Plans for 2026 include the introduction of a Tourism Development Bill, which will create a unified authority to coordinate tourism strategy, branding, and marketing. Significant developments, including the redevelopment of Prospect Reef Resort, will expand infrastructure and generate local employment opportunities. “We expect tourism revenue to reach \$462 million in 2026...but beyond numbers, our aim is to ensure that every Virgin Islander shares in the benefits of this growth.”

Building Food Security and the Blue Economy

Premier Wheatley reaffirmed the Government’s commitment to food security, agricultural development, and sustainable fisheries. “Agriculture and fisheries are vital to our resilience,” he said. “They are the foundation of our green and blue economies.”

Key 2026 investments include:

- \$575,000 for the Virgin Islands Agricultural Complex at Paraquita Bay;
- \$400,000 for a Fishing Complex at Omar Hodge Fisherman’s Wharf; and
- \$150,000 for a hydroponics pilot project on Virgin Gorda.

The Virgin Islands' participation in the UK Blue Belt Programme and establishment of an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) will enhance marine conservation and fisheries management.

Expanding International Diplomacy and Self-Governance

The Premier highlighted the Territory's active international engagement to safeguard autonomy, promote trade, and secure climate financing. "The Virgin Islands may be small, but our interests are global," he affirmed. "We have faced external pressures, but through diplomacy, we continue to protect our self-governance, strengthen our economy, and build international respect."

A Virgin Islands Diplomatic Service Policy and National Diplomatic Service Framework are being finalised to guide overseas representation, including offices in London and Hong Kong.

Advancing Renewable Energy and Sustainability

The Premier also confirmed continued progress toward a clean energy future through the STEP Renewable Energy Programme and the Anegada Solar Farm, which now provides up to 19 hours of power daily to the island.

"In 2026, we will expand solar generation across public buildings, schools, and community centres," the Premier forecasted. "This is about energy independence, environmental responsibility, and economic savings for our people."

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About:

The Government of the Virgin Islands is committed to promoting good governance and the sustainable development of the Territory with a view to ensuring a well-informed, prosperous, cohesive and stable society. The Premier's Office serves as the focal point for coordinating cross-sectoral policies and programmes and promoting the sustainable development of the Virgin Islands to ensure a well-informed, prosperous, cohesive and stable society.

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Additional Documents or Media

- [vf_2026_budget_pillars_of_progress_premier's_portfolio_2026_budget.pdf](#)