

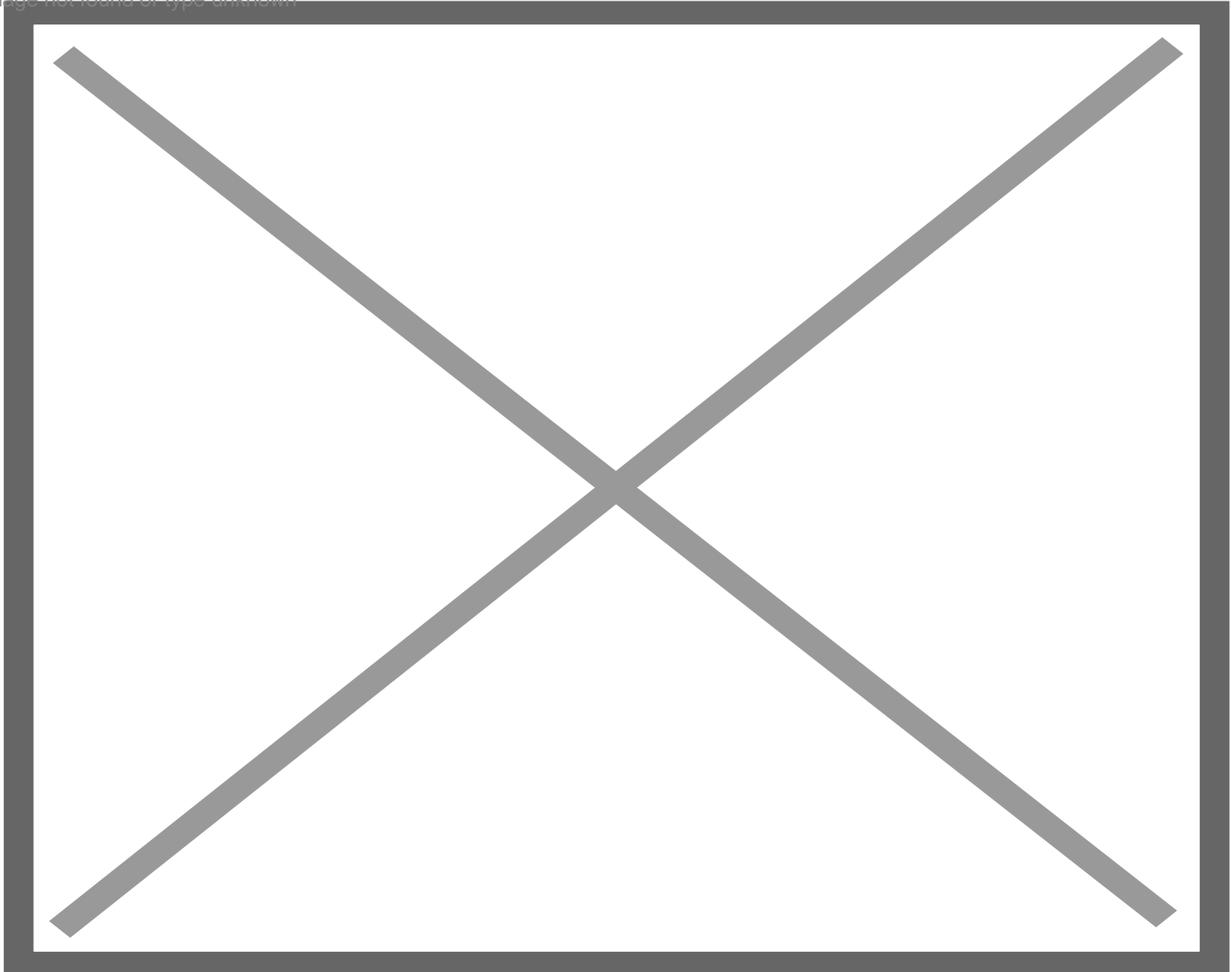
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Protests Against WAPA Persist as Organizers Call for Systemic Change, Board Disbanding

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Kia Griffith **June 28, 2020**

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Protester holds sign that reads, 'Get Up, Stand Up For Your Self' channeling the popular reggae song from legend Bob Marley, Get Up, Stand Up

ST. CROIX — Saturday marked the fourth day in which residents on St. Croix protested what has been deemed abuse from the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority. From a legacy of exorbitant utility rates, constant power outages and some of the highest executive pay in the territory, those who participated in the action on Saturday were unrelenting in their calls for change.

Protestors also complained about power outages' impact on residents' appliances, with seemingly no responsibility placed on WAPA.

The recent protests were in response to WAPA’s emergency board meeting on Monday to address the racially offensive comments made on Facebook by the authority's former Deputy General Counsel, Mark Kragel, who was no longer with the authority as of Tuesday. Thereafter, the outrage continued as WAPA’s public governing board meeting agenda for Thursday was to include consideration of raises for “management and confidential employees”. However, raises were removed from Thursday’s agenda after it was made public by the Consortium.

Gioviana Lugo explicitly defined the situation as abuse, including paying high utility rates and the destruction of appliances and other items utilizing power — all while receiving no reimbursements from WAPA.

Ms. Lugo said it is as if WAPA is saying to its customers, “Deal with it on your own, but keep paying and let us raise the prices as well.”

“We need better. We're tired. We're just tired,” she said, a reiteration of the message on her poster.

For WAPA’s board to include raises for “management and confidential employees” at this juncture in the territory, was an insult to the people of the Virgin Islands, some protestors said.

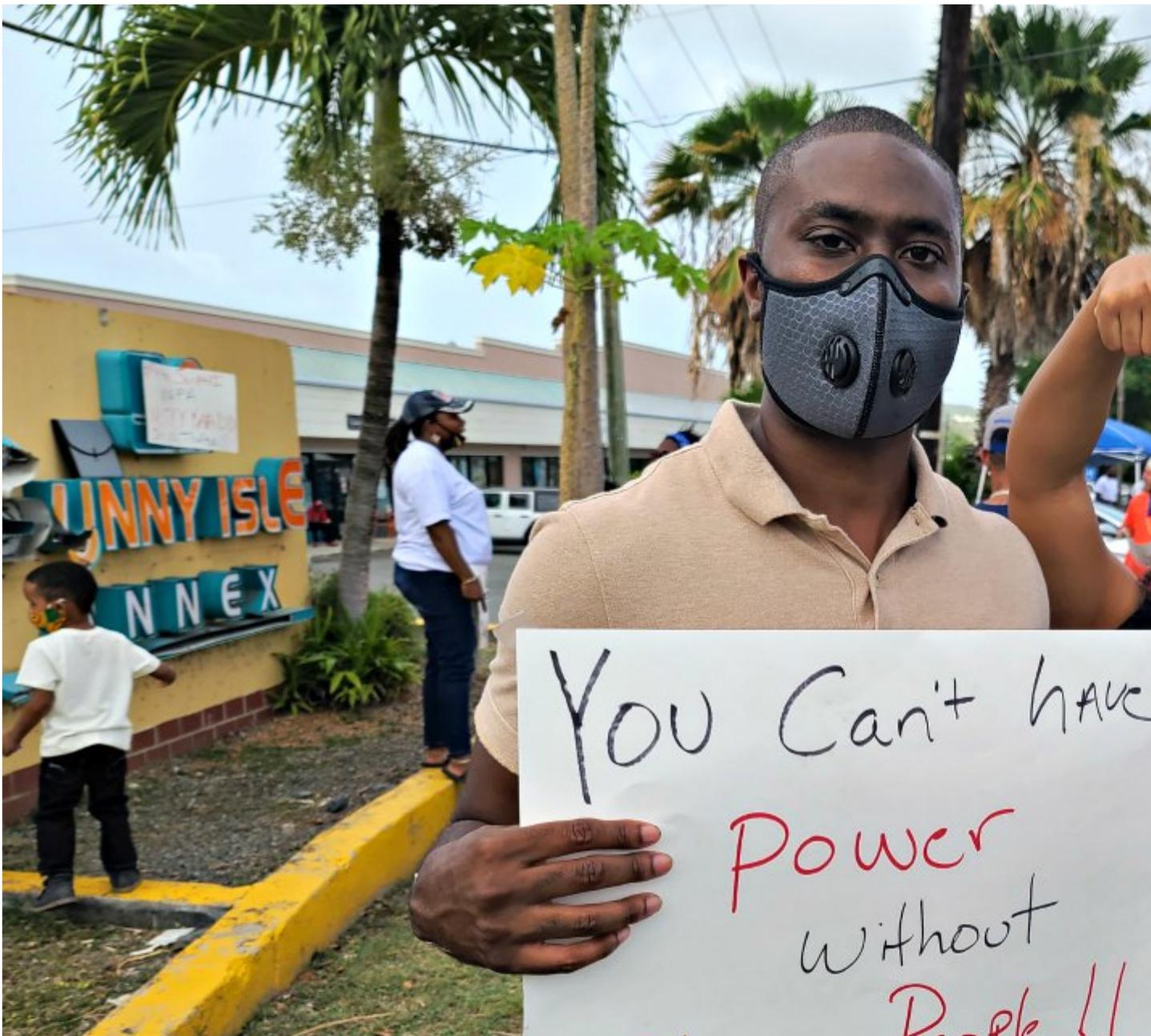


This individual told the Consortium that WAPA is the virus that has been destroying the U.S. Virgin Islands for decades.

“We have been taking this for too long, and after a while, it gets to the point either we take them off our necks or we stop breathing,” Anthony Laurent said as a parallel to the Black Lives Matter protests that began after George Floyd was killed on May 25 by a law enforcement officer, who knelt on his neck for 8 minute and 46 seconds. Mr. Laurent continued, “We’re going to push you off our necks. We’re going tell you, ‘We’re getting up; we’re standing up, and we’re to going to fight for our rights,’” he added, echoing Bob Marley’s famous song, Get Up Stand Up.

In response to the raises for WAPA’s unnamed management officials and employees, Eurman Fahie, the most prominent protester of injustice in the Virgin Islands, said, “You don’t reward people for being incompetent. Only in the Virgin Islands, we want to, we reward people for being incompetent.” He also suggested that WAPA’s board be disbanded for considering raises for “confidential rejects,” as he called them.

To improve WAPA’s faulty system, Charles Johnson urged WAPA board members and upper management to visit the island of Dominica’s only electrical service company—Dominica Electricity Services Limited (DOMLEC) —a hydro plant that is automated and unmanned by operators. In reference to the Virgin Islands’ only electricity provider, he said, “The system we have here is a failure. It’s going to destroy us before it’s over with.”



Ashley and Tionee Scotland, a married couple, protest on Saturday. Mr. Scotland is running for the Territorial Committee District of the USVI Democratic Party.

Kara Morrell, a resident of St. Croix for the past 5 years, said, “I’m tired of having to replace my appliances because [WAPA] has a faulty system.” She then said that the people of the V.I. deserve better electricity and deserve to use their appliances without them breaking, as a result of unpredictable outages. “If they are going to break them, then they should have to pay for them,” Ms. Morrell rationalized.

Mr. Fahie, who was often a one-man protestor for many years in the Sunny Isles vicinity, was proud to see the turnout from the young people on St. Croix. He stated that they are making a difference. He publicly applauded them and said, “The young generation is not going to accept the nonsense no more and that’s going to be the downfall of WAPA.”

Flip the Script VI, which organized the event, made its presence on Facebook following the comments from Mr. Kragel. The movement has since grown into a formidable group seeking broader changes to the system.

“It’s for change. It’s time for togetherness,” according to a representative of [Flip the Script VI](#).

Saturday’s protest was the highest turnout and the organizers said they look forward to a more unified front moving forward.

To support the movement, send an email to flipthescriptvi@gmail.com.

A collaborative protest was to take place on all three major islands on Saturday. However, representatives on St. Thomas and St. John said authorities did not approve the event, citing the rising spread of the coronavirus in the territory.