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Roach Calls For Financial Relief For Residents, Says WAPA Bills Should be Subsidized

Facing High Electricity Rates, Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach Voices Support for Subsidies and Raises Concerns Over WAPA Management

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Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach at Liberty Day in Grove on Wed., Nov. 1, 2023. By. DEAR PRODUCTIONS

Facing a crowd of protesters on Wednesday, Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach suggested that residents of the territory should receive assistance in the form of a subsidy for the high cost of electricity, which, at 42.65 cents per kilowatt-hour after the first 250 kWh, is second only to Hawaii in all of the United States.

Mr. Roach noted his reservations about the capabilities of WAPA's current leadership. "I have questions about the management and I have questions about the spending at WAPA, and when we have meetings I raise those questions," the lieutenant governor told protesters Wednesday at the D. Hamilton Jackson Day event, also called Liberty Day or Bull and Bread Day.

He added later in his response, "I think what we need to do is a subsidy across the board to underwrite the high cost of WAPA to residents of the territory. The same way that [we did with the \\$250](#), I think it should be a regular subsidy."

In April 2020, Governor Albert Bryan initiated the "YES" initiative that saw the government subsidizing residents' electric costs by \$250, and \$500 for businesses. The subsidy provided \$15.1 million — taken from the government's \$75 million allotment of the recently passed \$2.2 trillion CARES Act by Congress — to WAPA, while providing Virgin Islands households with some relief.

Mr. Roach's remarks came as irate residents demonstrated their frustration with various issues affecting life in the territory. They focused their attention on the lieutenant governor after spotting him in the crowd and handed him the microphone. Offering himself up for questions, Mr. Roach empathized with one woman who complained about receiving a \$270 electricity bill despite having a solar power setup at home. "I get the same issue," he told her. "I don't live in a fancy house with a generator or anything; I get the same issue with the bill."

The woman also suggested that WAPA supply clean water to residents affected by the heavy metal contamination crisis, and urged the lieutenant governor to be more vocal, in the face of what she perceived as Governor Bryan's apathy to the plight of the people.

"I don't come out and speak against the governor," explained the territory's second most senior executive. "That's not something that I'm supposed to do as a lieutenant governor. We have meetings, we have discussions about our various points of view with regard to what we should do to help."

Part of the problem with WAPA's high cost and uneven service delivery, Mr. Roach said, is the minuscule size of the territory's grid, compared to the mainland. "Power goes in one part of the grid...whether it's produced in Canada or the western United States or the Eastern United States, there's something to fall back on," the lieutenant governor remarked.