

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bryan Rejects State of Emergency as He Looks to End WAPA Outage Crisis This Week

Governor Albert Bryan Jr. says there is no need for a state of emergency despite weeks of outages in St. Thomas and St. John, blaming broken generators, cable damage and rising demand while promising repairs, added backup power and grid fixes within days.

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Ernice Gilbert **March 31, 2026**



The Randolph Harley Power Plant in St. Thomas, USVI. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM.

Governor Albert Bryan Jr. on Monday rejected calls for a state of emergency over the recent WAPA outages affecting St. Thomas and St. John, arguing that the crisis is not

rooted in a lack of money or authority but in aging infrastructure, damaged equipment, and a power demand that has outgrown the system's original capacity.

Speaking during Government House's Monday press briefing, Bryan said the last two weeks had been "absolute hell" for residents in the district, and acknowledged the anger directed at his administration as outages disrupted homes, events, daily routines, and businesses. Still, he said a state of emergency was not warranted because, in his view, the territory already has the resources needed to address the problem.

"There is no need for a state of emergency," Bryan said, explaining that he reserves such declarations for moments when government lacks money, procurement flexibility, or other necessary resources. He said that was not the case here.

Instead, Bryan described a chain of failures involving a cable serving St. John, damage beyond what officials initially believed they were dealing with, and a broken generator in St. Thomas. He also sharply criticized WAPA's public messaging, saying the utility has not communicated clearly enough with residents as the situation unfolded. He said he had directed WAPA to send hourly alerts and encouraged residents to sign up for updates on the utility's website.

The governor said the territory's problem is not simply that equipment is old, but that electricity demand has climbed well beyond what the system had been built around. When his administration took office, he said, peak demand in St. Thomas was about 45 megawatts. Today, he said, usage is peaking at 62 megawatts.

Bryan said the eight Wärtsilä units that were installed are all functioning, but they alone are not enough to carry present demand. Because of that, he said, older generators that were already slated for replacement still have to remain in service to meet the load. When one unit trips, he said, the rest of the system is thrown off and the plant has to be brought back one generator at a time, creating the repeated outages residents have been experiencing.

He said WAPA recently attempted to return another unit to service, but after a board was replaced, officials found that the larger motherboard appeared to be gone as well. According to Bryan, that recurring failure is one reason the plant has continued tripping offline.

Bryan said he instructed WAPA to move aggressively and stop worrying about cost in the short term. "Don't buy the used one. Buy the new one," he said, adding that anyone who needs to travel, procure parts, or take emergency steps to get the system stabilized should do so.

He said the needed part was expected Monday and that officials hoped to move away from rotating outages once it was installed. But Bryan said he also directed WAPA not to stop with the immediate repair. He said the utility must also repair the two other broken generators and address additional line issues so the territory is not thrown back into the same position.

The governor promised that the repairs would not drag on for months. When asked

whether residents should expect another three to four months of instability, Bryan flatly rejected that idea.

"This thing is going to be wrapped up by the end of this week, maximum," he said. "I'm trying to get it wrapped up tomorrow."

Bryan said the broader stabilization effort includes repairing another generator that needs a gearbox, overhauling a second unit, fixing additional damaged cables, and establishing a bypass route to strengthen service to St. John. He also referenced a damaged cable near The Ritz and said it would be repaired as well.

Beyond that, Bryan said the territory is still moving forward with solar projects intended to ease generation pressure. He pointed to the large solar plants and battery support in St. Croix as evidence that the approach has already helped reduce both the frequency and duration of outages there. In St. Thomas, he said expedited permits had been secured for two solar projects that are intended to help close the territory's megawatt shortfall. He said those projects could add more power to the grid by midyear, with completion hoped for by summer.

He also said temporary generation backed by FEMA is expected to help support the system, and noted that the government has already issued the RFP, selected a winner, and identified contractors for plant rebuilding work in St. Thomas and St. Croix.

Throughout the briefing, Bryan stressed that the current work is already funded. He said that is another reason he sees no justification for invoking emergency powers.

"There's nothing to really do for a state of emergency, because all these things are funded already," he said. "They are funded. We just need to get people in here now."

When asked whether the government might use Epstein settlement money to help cover repair costs, Bryan said he would not touch that money for WAPA. He said rainy day funds and other government sources could be accessed if needed, though he added that he would prefer to work with the Legislature if additional appropriations become necessary. He later said several senators, including Avery Lewis, Angel Bolques and Novelle Francis, had already reached out, and that lawmakers may ultimately be asked to help push through "a couple million" once the total bill becomes clear.

Bryan also addressed whether a state of emergency could help residents who lost groceries, needed refrigeration for medicine, or relied on powered medical devices. He said Human Services Commissioner Averil George had been working on possible SNAP-related relief in some cases involving lengthy outages, but he said he did not believe a state of emergency was the proper vehicle for broad compensation for spoiled food losses. He said he was intentionally being cautious with emergency funds, particularly with hurricane season ahead and amid concerns about how responsive the federal government may be to disaster requests.

The governor also spoke more broadly about WAPA's turnaround effort, saying the authority is still following its restructuring path, including solar expansion, the continued transition to propane, and debt-related work. He repeated that he wants to lower the

utility's base rate before he leaves office, but said he does not want to do it in a way that is temporary or ceremonial.

He also said new metering work remains a priority, though he indicated financing had not moved as quickly as hoped.

Bryan repeatedly returned to one point: the outages are painful, the public's anger is justified, and the system's failures are rooted in decades of deferred maintenance that cannot be reversed overnight. But he said the territory is now moving through that backlog and that the pressure to fix it has only strengthened his resolve. "Transformation is painful, but we going to get through this," Bryan said.

Governor Albert Bryan Jr. on Monday rejected calls for a state of emergency over the recent WAPA outages affecting St. Thomas and St. John, arguing that the crisis is not rooted in a lack of money or authority but in aging infrastructure, damaged equipment, and a power demand that has outgrown the system's original capacity.

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