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## Roach and Francis Launch Campaign on Experience and Accountability as Power Outages Hand Rivals a WAPA Opening

Roach and Francis launched their Democratic gubernatorial ticket in St. Thomas, framing their campaign around experience, accountability and delivery, while rival Plaskett-Potter seized on power interruptions during the livestream to attack WAPA failures.

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Tregenza Roach speaks at the podium during the Roach-Francis campaign announcement in St. Thomas, where the ticket framed its gubernatorial bid around experience, accountability and delivering results for the territory. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM.

Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach and Senator Novelle Francis Jr. officially launched their Democratic gubernatorial campaign Saturday night in St. Thomas, presenting themselves as a seasoned ticket built on experience, integrity and public service, while power interruptions during the event gave their rivals an immediate opening to criticize the territory's long-running electricity crisis.

The campaign event introduced Mr. Roach, who currently serves as lieutenant governor in the Bryan-Roach administration, as a candidate for governor, with Mr. Francis, the former Senate president and former police commissioner, as his running mate for lieutenant governor. Their message centered on "serving with purpose," accountability, government delivery, public trust and the argument that the territory's next phase requires experienced leadership capable of turning existing resources and projects into tangible results.

But the event was interrupted by power outages, a moment that quickly became part of the political conversation. The Plaskett-Potter team, another Democratic gubernatorial ticket, [reacted on Facebook](#) by writing, "Imagine you run the government, but can't keep the power on during your own announcement. That should say all you need to know about what voting Roach Francis will get you," alongside a screenshot showing the "stream interrupted" notice from the Roach-Francis livestream.

The rival campaign later added, "WAPA is not a joking matter. It's a real serious issue for the people of the Virgin Islands and we deserve a team that will speak honestly about its issues. We are impatient. And will not settle for accepting status quo."

The interruptions came at a politically difficult time for Mr. Roach, who has served as lieutenant governor for nearly eight years under Governor Albert Bryan Jr., as WAPA remains one of the territory's most persistent and politically sensitive issues.

Before Mr. Roach addressed the crowd, former Senator Jean Ford endorsed the ticket, describing Mr. Roach and Mr. Francis as "true statesmen" and "men of integrity" who understand the major issues facing Virgin Islanders, including education, healthcare, crime, the economy, the rising cost of living, WAPA and quality of life.

Mr. Ford pointed to their records in public office, saying their experience as lawmakers and public servants makes them qualified to lead. He described Mr. Roach as a lawyer, educator, author, senator and two-term lieutenant governor, and Mr. Francis as a former law enforcement officer, police commissioner, businessman, senator and two-term Senate president.

Brianna Thomas, a University of the Virgin Islands student and intern in Mr. Francis's office, introduced him as a mentor and public servant whose legislative record includes probate reform, dedicated funding for agriculture, creation of the St. Croix South Shore Trade Zone, integration of fire and emergency medical services, behavioral healthcare reform and Act 7934, which expanded the public school curriculum to require civics courses for high school students.

Mr. Francis used his announcement speech to frame himself as a "son of the soil" shaped by family, community, law enforcement and legislative service. He said his 25 years as a Virgin Islands police officer taught him that people need leaders who show up, act and deliver.

"Serving with purpose is not just a slogan for me, it's a way of life," Mr. Francis said.

He argued that the territory is at a critical point, with major funding secured and projects underway, but warned that money and announcements alone do not amount to progress.

“Opportunity alone is not transformation,” he said. “Funding alone is not progressing. A plan on the shelf is not a repaved road, a hospital rebuilt, a permit approved, a senior cared for, or a good enough reason to make our young person stay at home and build a life in these islands.”

Mr. Francis said progress must be judged by delivery, not announcements, and criticized government failures around missed timelines, poor coordination and declining public trust. He also said accountability would be central to a Roach-Francis administration.

“Serving with purpose means tracking every public dollar with precision,” he said. “Serving with purpose means setting timelines and meeting them. Serving with purpose means a government that works as one, not in silos.”

Former Delegate to Congress Donna Christensen also endorsed the ticket by video, praising Mr. Roach’s integrity and saying Mr. Francis shares the same values. “After 50 years of serving you, I know the difference between those who serve with purpose and those who serve only the few,” she said. “This is the team that serves with purpose.”

Former Senator Donald Cole delivered a colorful endorsement focused on his decades-long relationship with Mr. Roach, dating back to their school years. He credited Mr. Roach with the idea behind UVI’s free tuition program and urged registered Democrats to support the ticket in the August 1 primary.

Mr. Roach, in a campaign video shown before his remarks, described arriving in St. Thomas from St. Kitts at age eight and said the territory shaped his values. He said he became a journalist because democracy depends on truth, and an attorney because justice must apply to everyone.

In his live address, Mr. Roach said he never saw himself seeking the governorship as a child and did not view the office as a matter of status or history, but as a 24-hour responsibility rooted in service.

He said he and Mr. Francis had discussed running together for approximately a year and argued that his own experience as lieutenant governor gives him a unique understanding of what the role requires. Mr. Roach said he would know how to treat Mr. Francis as lieutenant governor in a way that keeps the administration unified.

“The second must understand and accept that there is only one Governor at a time,” Mr. Roach said, adding that the office requires diplomacy and humility to avoid dysfunction.

Mr. Roach defended key parts of the Bryan-Roach administration’s record, including its handling of Covid-19, the permanent extension of rum cover-over revenues, support for the Government Employees’ Retirement System, the payoff of old government debt to WAPA, implementation of UVI free tuition, and housing initiatives such as VI Slice, the land trust, Bellevue, Calabash Boom, D. Hamilton Jackson Terrace, Magens Junction and Donoe.

He also said the next phase would require a renewed focus on seniors, vulnerable residents, the mentally ill, workforce development, infrastructure, schools, hospitals and Head Start facilities.

Mr. Roach addressed WAPA directly, calling it “the WAPA elephant in the room” and acknowledging that residents “suffer darkness too often.” He said the power utility continues to affect the health and welfare of residents and the economy, but argued that progress has been made, including replacement of wooden poles with composite poles, undergirding work, new generators for St. John, expansion of solar and renewable projects, and the payoff of the propane

conversion debt.

He said more work remains to improve grid reliability and make electricity affordable for residents and businesses.

The Roach-Francis campaign now enters a Democratic primary in which the ticket is working to define itself as experienced, steady and accountable. But Saturday's launch also underscored how quickly WAPA, public frustration and the Bryan-Roach administration's record could shape the race. Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett and Senate President Milton Potter [launched](#) their gubernatorial bid on April 18, while Senator Donna Frett-Gregory and running mate Rodney Moorehead are expected to announce their campaign in early June. All three tickets are expected to compete in the Democratic primary on August 1.

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