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Bryan Vetoes Bill That Sought to Limit WAPA's Billing Cycle to 35 Days, Action Represent's Governor's 'Blatant Disregard' For Virgin Islanders, Francis Says

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Governor Albert Bryan

Governor Albert Bryan has vetoed Bill No. 33-0290, which sought to bring relief to Virgin Islands ratepayers by reducing the amount of time the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority could back-bill customers. The legislation sought to define a billing cycle as a period not exceeding 35 days, which would prohibit WAPA from its double billing strategy of 60 days.

The measure was unanimously supported by senators during an emergency session on March 27.

“I am extremely disappointed in Governor Bryan’s decision to veto Bill 33-0290, which would have provided desperately needed relief to Virgin Islands ratepayers,” said bill sponsor and Senate President Novelle Francis in a statement issued Tuesday night. “Our ratepayers have been harmed by WAPA’s lack of accountability. Ratepayers cannot be asked to bear the burden of WAPA’s inconsistent billing practices, which allows the Authority to issue 60-day bills and to reach back three months to correct their own billing errors. Our community deserves greater accountability from WAPA, and Bill 33-0290 is one way to move the utility towards better billing and financial practices.”

Mr. Francis blasted the governor further and said his actions showed indifference to the plight of Virgin Islanders, many of whom are struggling to make ends meet.

“Governor Bryan’s veto of this bill shows a blatant disregard for the people of this territory, who make many sacrifices to pay their WAPA bills and keep the lights on. No one should have to choose whether they will purchase medication or food or pay their utility bill,” Mr. Francis said. “By refusing to approve legislation that would define the bill cycle and restrict WAPA’s ability to reach back more than 1 month to correct billing errors, the Governor has made it clear that he is not interested in moving WAPA towards greater transparency or accountability. I am puzzled by his veto of Bill 33-0290, especially when WAPA leadership indicated their support of the proposed legislation.”

Mr. Francis expressed dedication to continue working on reforms “that would not only bring relief to our ratepayers, but also create an environment for WAPA to be held accountable for its billing and management practices. The people of this territory deserve no less.”