

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Sunday Edition: WAPA and the Business Case for the CARE Refund Legislation

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It is shameful and disgraceful that in islands marketed as Paradise under the American Flag, that our senior citizens living on fixed incomes, are choosing between buying their prescriptions and living in darkness. -- *Teri Helenese*

A senator in the 31st Legislature of the US Virgin Islands ought to introduce CARE Refund Legislation that gives US Virgin Islanders relief in their Water and Power Authority (WAPA) bills for each and every power outage experienced in their daily lives. The CARE Refund Legislation and its supporting calculation needs to be well thought out and methodical. The CARE acronym could stand for Customer Automatically Refunded for Electricity-loss or Community Action For Relief in Energy.

Until there is a robust project plan in place to take US Virgin Islanders out of chronic darkness, dramatically lower utility costs, and make affordable financing available to homeowners who would like to purchase solar systems, something needs to give, and the publicly-owned utility company needs to be brought into the 21st century.

It is unconscionable that US Virgin Islanders and their families experienced three-hour power outages on Thanksgiving Day 2014. It is reprehensible that before and since that time, on holidays, like second nature, and running blackout jokes in the news and on social media, it is commonplace for US Virgin Islanders to be powerless—literally. It is shameful and disgraceful that in islands marketed as Paradise under the American Flag, that our senior citizens living on fixed incomes, are choosing between buying their prescriptions and living in darkness.

WAPA gave the US Virgin Islands Levelized Energy Adjustment Clause (LEAC) but the Territory also needs WAPA to CARE. Listed are possible acronyms for the CARE Refund in WAPA customer bills. CARE should automatically tabulate on monthly bills based upon the number of power outages in a month. These chronic and constant power outages are an assault on US Virgin Islanders and WAPA does need to CARE.

Something's gotta give.

This is a vicious cycle. WAPA positions that millions of dollars the USVI Government owes the public utility significantly and adversely impacts its ability to provide quality service, maintain the utility company, and advance capital improvement projects. Where does it end? Get in a room, duke it out, compromise, come out with results that endure for the people— in phases even, and communicate to citizens, the action plan and a phased project plan.

US Virgin Islanders are thoughtful, reasonable, and recognize change won't come overnight. But even a phased approach will lend relief. Somebody has to take the bull by the horn. Three hour power outages on Thanksgiving Day is not funny or acceptable, and to add insult to injury, power outages are a normal way of life. It is high time citizen's stand up, demand change, lobby senators in the 31st Legislature to draft and vote on the CARE Refund Legislation, and hold WAPA accountable.