

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## Op-Ed: From Energy Crisis To An Enhanced Quality Of Life

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U.S. Virgin Islands business owners who have sacrificed and survived for years, now sit face-to-face and are forced to make the grave decision to close their doors because their WAPA bills literally strangle them and force them into insolvency. Virgin Islanders who are unemployed and underemployed are stressing and praying that the territory does not go over the fiscal cliff because the consequences will be dire; worsening the already untenable unemployment insurance situation, and for residents who sit in darkness at home for fear of another whopping WAPA bill they cannot afford to pay—these serious problems demand serious solutions.

The elderly, senior citizens, baby boomers, our parents, grandparents, and young families are trying to make their way living on modest fixed incomes. Even with some fixes in place by WAPA which is commendable, among this list, many are still being bombarded with ungodly WAPA prices, power outages, choosing between buying their prescriptions for diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease versus paying their light bills.

These examples only scratch the surface. To call a spade-a-spade, the U.S. Virgin Islands is under siege in an energy crisis. This song and Tango has been on replay and waltz for decades. It's time for solutions and the Government of the Virgin Islands has the leadership acumen to deliver results in energy that endure.

There are awesome opportunities to tackle our energy problems through partnerships between the Government of the US Virgin Islands, the USDA Rural Development, private companies, and lending agencies. U.S. Virgin Islanders are paying very close attention to public-private partnership opportunities that will assist low and moderate income homeowners in becoming more energy independent and help reduce their energy expenses. Citizens are paying close attention to how the Government of the U.S. Virgin Islands uses the federal funds available to help its citizens out of the energy crisis. Constituents are paying close attention to federal programs that other territories are tapping into with hopes of the same remedy in America's Paradise.

During these guava crop times, a WAPA Town Hall open to the public at the University of the Virgin Islands on both islands, in conjunction with the Director of Energy, and other key stakeholders in government and the private industry is in order—where both teams can discuss and peel the layers on alternative and sustainable sources of energy and financing, whereby U.S. Virgin Islanders gain a better understanding of these leaders plan to steer the territory out of this crisis. In doing so, there will also be greater understanding of the plan's scope and implications, and residents' individual and collective roles in the transformation.

Town Halls will generate short term wins and communicate the WAPA and Department of Energy vision for buy-in. This level of engagement by WAPA and the Department of Energy will do some important things that include: