

The Virgin Islands Consortium

After Pressure, Gas Stations On St. Croix Drop Prices To \$3.19 Per Gallon

Business / **Published On September 08, 2015 09:33 AM /**

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ST. CROIX -- Following persistent pressure from this publication, the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs and Senator Kurt Vialet, gas stations here have moved to drop the price of fuel from \$3.39 per gallon -- where it remained for many months even as prices saw steep declines on world markets -- to \$3.19.

The Consortium has been on top of this issue for months, and have even received notice from lawyers of Gateway Gas Station, located in Peter's Rest, asking the publication to stop using images of its client's business when reporting on unfair gas prices, fearing customers would become disgruntled at Gateway, the busiest operation on this island, as its price for regular fuel remained steady at \$3.39 per gallon along with every other

service station here for several months.

Senator Nereida "Nelly" Rivera-O'Reilly said on Monday she was pleased to announce that prices here would see a drop of \$.20 as of Tuesday, and invited members of the community to a town hall meeting at UVI's Great Hall (5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. on Thursday), along with DLCA and the Dept. of Labor officials, to discuss the issue of fuel price.

The uproar began after The Consortium [ran a story in February](#) that revealed certain gas stations were profiting upwards \$40,000 monthly, making over \$1 on each gallon of gas sold to consumers. Back then, the price here was \$3.65 per gallon, but world markets were considerably cheaper, with some operations on the U.S. mainland selling as low as \$1.49 per gallon. And prices on St. Thomas, where gas had been historically more expensive, dropped below \$3 at some stations.

The price eventually dropped to \$3.39 on St. Croix, but remained at that level across the board for months. In St. Thomas, the gas market has been so competitive that prices are now below the \$2.70 mark, with 1st Stop Gas Station selling regular unleaded fuel for [\\$2.69 per gallon](#). Just last week, The Consortium took pictures of the same gas station when it sold regular fuel at [\\$2.99 per gallon](#).

The publication's [latest story](#) on the issue highlighted the disparity in the price of gas between the two islands, even as gas station businesses on both islands continue to purchase fuel from Puerto Rico.

But there is still room from improvement here, as the price of oil is currently being traded at historic lows on world markets -- between the \$40-\$45 range.

On Monday, August 31, [senator Violet said](#) gas stations on St. Croix were "ripping off" the people. He reiterated his stance the day after and called on the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs to [put a cap](#) on the profit margin of gas and force the owners to take the government to court.

"Perhaps we're going to have to let them take us to court," Violet said. "Put a cap on the markup and let them open up the books in court and show us how much they're marking it up. Let us go to court so we could reveal what is going in the gas industry. Something needs to done."

He continued: "We might lose the case because the courts might say it was not legal for you to take them to court because you didn't conduct the study. But fine, they will have to open the books, and the people of the Virgin Islands will be able to clearly see that they're ripping us off; and they really need to stop because that's more disposable income."

The Consortium on Monday night spoke to the owner of Super Tanker, located near the Sunny Isle stoplights, while employees were changing the price from \$3.39 to \$3.19 per gallon. Asked why they were dropping the price now, he said it was because prices had seen declines in Puerto Rico.

"You cannot make it a situation between St. Thomas and St. Croix because the situation is different even if it's the same Virgin Islands," said Raed Bazzar. "Back then, when

HOVENSA was opened, we used to be below St. Thomas by \$.50 to \$.70 because we got it local. But remember, right now, we're getting it from San Juan and we're not the ones in control of the prices."

Bazzar, however, did not explain why the prices on St. Thomas were considerably cheaper than St. Croix, and it's a matter that is expected to be discussed at Thursday's town hall meeting.

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