

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Roach And Rivera-O'Reilly Propose Bill To Provide Energy Assistance To Low Income Seniors And Disabled Residents

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ST. THOMAS -- Senators Tregenza Roach and Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly have teamed up on a bill that provides energy assistance to low-income seniors and the disabled by utilizing revenue generated by the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority (WAPA) through late charges and reconnection fees, a press release Mr. Roach's office issued yesterday has revealed.

At a recent Committee on Finance hearing on WAPA's budget, Mr. Roach said he learned that in the past fiscal year, the semi-autonomous entity collected \$3.1 Million

in “other revenues”.

When Mr. Roach inquired about the source of the other stream of revenue, WAPA officials reported that the line item consisted largely of late fees and fees related to disconnection of utilities.

"I was always concerned about these penalties collected by WAPA but had never seen the amount quantified. It troubled me that such a large amount of money is being collected from the same people who can least afford WAPA's services," Mr. Roach said.

Upon discussing the matter with Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly, Mr. Roach said she was equally outraged and they moved immediately to collaborate on the drafting points for legislation.

The senators agreed that the best use for these funds would be to allocate them to the Energy Crisis Assistance Program (ECAP) under the Department of Human Services. The ECAP program assists the elderly and disabled persons to maintain their utility services.

Mr. Roach said he believes that WAPA will not be adversely affected by diverting these funds to the ECAP program where they will be better utilized to assist those in need.

“These are not funds that WAPA should be anticipating, so they should not be budgeted or counted upon by WAPA to address any critical need,” Mr. Roach, an Independent legislator, concluded.