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Owed Over \$26 Million, Waste Haulers Territory-Wide Plan to Halt Garbage Collection Beginning June 8

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Bates Trucking headquarters in Peter's Rest, St. Croix By. VI CONSORTIUM

The territory's waste haulers have made a decision to stop garbage collection beginning June 8, following a Friday meeting with the Waste Management Authority (WMA) that ended without an agreement to pay the haulers.

According to James Bates, owner of Bates Trucking on St. Croix which serves about 95 percent of the housing communities on the island and roughly 3,500 homes, the companies — haulers and landfill operators — have been in talks with WMA dating back to 2017 for payment for a government debt that has ballooned to more than \$26 million.

According to Mr. Bates, Waste Management Authority said Friday it would attempt to find funds to pay the haulers, but the authority has to rely on the government, which has not provided the funding. WMA spokeswoman, Melody Rames, said on Friday she would respond with comment but had not done so at time of writing.

"They are trying to find some kind of money to pay us but it looks like they don't have no money so they have to depend on the government," Mr. Bates said Friday. "The haulers have said they cannot continue to work like that. The landfill operators — including A9 Trucking, Marco Trucking, Joshua Trucking, Just Right, Bates Trucking, Goldmind — we can't continue to do business like that and not getting paid. It's a lot of money they owe us."

A meeting this week among the haulers will determine what amount the companies will demand from the government to prevent a work stoppage, Mr. Bates said.

Mr. Bates said he was grateful for private contracts that have enabled him to keep his workforce employed during the Covid-19 pandemic, but said with the mounting government debt, his business was at risk and he could not afford to continue providing daily service for years without receiving payment.

"The Peter's Rest Bates site we're going to have to close it because we owe a lot of vendors and we can't continue to operate like that," Mr. Bates said.

Waste buildup around the territory would be a catastrophe and health hazard, so it is expected that the government will find funding to prevent such a disaster. But the action from haulers and landfill operators come at a time when the government could least afford it. According to Governor Albert Bryan, the territory — badly damaged by Covid-19-related lockdowns — had only \$8 million cash on hand as of last Thursday, and the administration has to secure \$19 million before Thursday to make government payroll. The government is in negotiations with FirstBank and Banco Popular for a \$60 million revenue anticipation note bond — \$30 million from each bank. However, if the funding is secured, it is expected to be used for government operations, most critically payroll.